



BLUE AND GRAY WEEKLY



Stories of Brave Northern and Southern Boys in the Civil War.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1904 by Frank Tousey, 24 Union Square, New York.

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NEW YORK, MARCH 17, 1905.

Price 5 Cents.

FORCED TO SURRENDER; OR, THE BOYS IN GRAY'S HARD LUCK.

By LIEUT HARRY LEE.



The treachery of the farmer was apparent. He stood a grinning and triumphant witness while the
Young Union officer said: "Boys, it's all up! You mig't as well surrender!"
Will Prentiss tried to think of a plan to escape

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CHAPTER I.

AT THE OLD TAVERN.

Lee was on his famous march through Maryland. He had expected to meet with a hearty welcome from the people of that state, and to augment his force largely by means of recruiting.

But his hopes were not as fully realized as he had been led to believe they would be. There was a general apathy among the Marylanders.

Perhaps it was that they were already weary of the war and inclined to the pursuits of peace. However this was, they certainly did not respond to the strenuous call of the Confederacy for volunteers.

In that famous march through Maryland, in Jackson's division, there was a company of young soldiers in gray, from Richmond, Virginia.

They were captained by a young and enthusiastic Confederate partisan named Will Prentiss.

He was the son of Colonel Jeff Prentiss, of the Confederate president's staff, and as brave and noble a youth as could be found in the land.

Will Prentiss had organized the little company of Virginia Grays. They were all youths of Virginia's best families.

His lieutenant was Fred Randolph, also a brave and loyal youth. The second lieutenant was Walter Gray, and the first sergeant was Joe Spotswood.

The Grays had fought with success and great distinction thus far through the war.

In the battles before Richmond, at Cedar Mountain and Thoroughfare Gap they had distinguished themselves.

Indeed, so thoroughly had they won the confidence of General Lee that he was often impelled to call upon them when any special or important scouting duty was in order.

So it happened that on the present day Will Prentiss and the Virginia Grays found themselves in advance of Jackson's column several miles and entrusted with a very perilous duty.

General Lee's orders to the boy captain, received the day before, read as follows:

"My Dear Prentiss: On receipt of this, it is my desire that you procure horses and mount your company. Then you will ride in advance of Jackson's columns and make thorough search for Manuel Laton, the Union guerilla who has committed so many atrocities along our line since entering Maryland. Hang him at once when captured. Then report to me for further orders.

(Signed) "R. E. LEE, General Commanding."

"Whew!" exclaimed Lieutenant Randolph, when he read the order. "That is the toughest contract we have ever undertaken, Will. We shall find it a hard one."

"All right," said the young captain. "That is all the greater reason why we should bend our best energies to carry it out."

"Oh, certainly!"

"Now, I don't know anything about this Manuel Laton. Do you?"

"I have heard that he gives no quarter. All prisoners are either hanged or shot!"

"Horrible! We will give him a dose of his own medicine——"

"If we catch him!"

"Yes; if we catch him."

Will Prentiss was not long in getting things ready for this new enterprise.

Horses were procured on the order from General Lee, and the Grays were prepared to act as mounted infantry.

This was not difficult for them, for all were good riders and had been on similar excursions. It was not long before they were all equipped.

Riding in front of the army was indeed perilous work.

They were bound to encounter roving bands of guerillas and detachments of the Union army.

But the Grays had the assistance of a scout, Jack Nelson, who was familiar with the country, and was shrewd and skilful.

Nelson was a tall, muscular man of middle age. He was not dressed in uniform, but in civilian attire. He rode with Will at the head of the company.

Nightfall was at hand, and the Grays had arrived at the forks of a road. Here was an abandoned tavern, where, a few days before, there had been a hot skirmish between Union troops and the Confederate advance guard.

The windows were shattered, and the walls of the house were punctured by bullet holes.

But there was no sign of the enemy in the vicinity and, as the place offered shelter, Will decided to stay there for the night.

So orders were given for the Grays to dismount and bivouac.

The horses were corralled in the adjoining field.

Fortunately, hay and grain was found in the barn nearby. This gave the horses a good feed.

As for the Grays, they had their rations. During the day they had done some foraging, and had secured chickens and a couple of pigs.

At the saddle-horn of nearly every Gray was hung a fat fowl. So they were not likely to go hungry.

Joe Spotswood, whistling the "Bonnie Blue Flag," was busy getting things in order for the bivouac. Camp fires were made and guards posted.

The officers took possession of the house, and soon had a roaring fire inside in the great fireplace.

The tavern was a great, old-fashioned structure, with wide porches and low windows. There were great fanlights over the doors.

It had been built in colonial days, and much of its revolutionary history was connected with it. The rooms were high-ceiled and paneled in wood. It was an old-fashioned house.

Some of the furniture was left, and Will and his boys found it quite the most comfortable camping place they had yet come across.

They proceeded to make themselves comfortable. Sam Payton, who cooked for the officers, laid an appetizing repast before them on the long table.

It is hardly necessary to say that ample justice was rendered this.

"Hurrah for a soldier's life!" cried Fred Randolph, with a hearty laugh. "To-day we feast like a king; to-morrow we munch hard luck!"

"It is that very variety that gives charm to the career," said Lieutenant Gray.

"You are right," cried Will Prentiss. "After all, things are well ordered in this life. It all depends upon ourselves whether we get true enjoyment or not."

"So it does!" agreed Fred. "That campaign before Richmond was a tough one; but, as I look back upon it now, I'd like to go all through it again."

"I don't know about that," demurred the orderly sergeant. "I like a little interval between battles. It was seven days of constant fighting."

"Can any one tell what the future will hold?" asked Fred Randolph. "What is going to be the result of this move upon Washington? Shall we simply march right into the Yankee capital, or shall we be repulsed?"

"Repulsed?" cried Will. "That is not what we are fighting for. Certainly we will not be repulsed. Washington is as good as taken."

"I hope so."

"I am sure of it."

It can be seen that the spirits of the boy soldiers were high. But their hopes and their supreme confidence in future events were to be rudely dashed.

Although they could not believe it at the moment, Lee's advance through Maryland was destined to meet with disaster and failure.

All the great victories won by the Confederacy thus far were to fall far short of the consummation of that end so devoutly hoped for by the Southern partisans.

But, basking in the glow of the hearth fire that night in the old tavern, the young Confederate officers did not know it.

And, not knowing it, they were confident and happy.

They little dreamed, though, of what lay before them. If they had, it is hardly likely that they would have faltered or turned back, for they were not of that sort.

"I say, Will," cried Fred Randolph, as his gaze roamed about the paneled tap room of the tavern, "this is an old-fashioned place, isn't it?"

"It certainly is!"

"Look at that old bar over there. You can bet that many a glass of flip or blackjack of toddy has passed across it."

"I daresay!"

"Many an old chap in cocked hat and swell clothes has sat right here and smoked his pipe where we are at this very moment sitting."

"Yes."

"Curious old walls, aren't they. All paneled in wood. It recalls a story I once read of a baronial hall in England, where the panels would open to a secret spring and reveal a secret chamber or compartment. Hello! That's queer."

The young lieutenant fixed his gaze on one of the panels opposite him.

It was the fifth from the door in counting. Fred's keen gaze had noted that it gaped a little, leaving a small crevice, perhaps one-fourth of an inch in width.

It might have been the effect of the heat warping the wood. This was Fred's first thought.

Then he gave a great start.

Was his eyesight deceiving him?

Or did the panel gently slip back into place? The young lieutenant rubbed his eyes.

He looked again.

The crevice was no longer there.

"Humph!" he muttered. "That is certainly very queer. I can't understand it. It will bear investigation."

"What is the matter?" asked Will Prentiss.

Fred arose and advanced to the panel. He pressed on it and ran a finger along its moulding.

There was no crevice. It seemed tight and quite like the other panels.

He pressed hard upon it and tried to move it. But in vain. It was apparently firm.

"What's the matter with you, Fred?" asked Will Prentiss. "Do you think this is another of your English baronial houses of secret chambers?"

Fred drew a deep breath.

"Perhaps I am a fool," he said. "Perhaps it was my fancy. But I could swear that I saw that panel move and close a slight crevice."

At this Will Prentiss laughed merrily.

"That's a good one on you, Fred!" he cried. "I never would have believed that you had such a powerful imagination. That panel is no different from the others."

To prove this Will Prentiss rapped on it with the hilt of his sword.

CHAPTER II.

THE SECRET PANEL.

The panel certainly seemed firm. This settled it.

Fred was perfectly willing to adjudge himself mistaken and that it was all an optical delusion.

He resumed his seat, and conversation turned upon other matters.

"Do you think we will ever be able to catch that Manuel Laton?" he asked.

"I don't see why not."

"He is a slippery rogue."

"That is true!"

"Do you know, I fancy he is not very far from here at this moment?"

"Well, I hope so. Nothing would please me more than to run across him."

Just then the door opened, and Jack Nelson, the scout, walked in.

Will Prentiss looked up eagerly.

"Well, Nelson," he asked, "what have you learned? Is there anything new?"

"I have been a mile beyond our picket guard," replied the scout. "I have seen no sign of an enemy."

"Then we can be secure here for to-night?"

"I think so."

"Very good. Sit down, Nelson. We were just speaking of Manuel Laton and wishing we could locate him."

"Yes," said the scout. "I fancy we shall run across him soon. He has been ranging the country south of here, and was headed this way. He may be here very soon."

"I hope so."

"So do I. But I have a surprising story for you."

"What is it?"

"On my way down the highway I came to a farm house. The farmer, whose name is Smith, told me of a Union spy who called at his house a few hours ago. He said that he passed this way, and thinks that he must be in hiding hereabouts."

Will and Fred were interested.

"That is odd, indeed," said the boy captain. "Where could he be hiding?"

"Well, that is the question. Perhaps in this very house."

Will started up.

"We'll have the place searched," he said. "It might be most important to capture the fellow."

"I feel sure it would."

"Very good. Let us see if we can get him."

Spotswood was called, with a guard, and the search began. From cellar to attic the old house was explored.

But no sign of the spy could be found. It seemed certain that he was not in the old tavern.

Will Prentiss, however, was not satisfied. He went back to the tap room. A startling idea had come to him.

"Fred," he said, in a low tone, "which one of the panels did you in your fancy see move?"

Fred Randolph gave a start.

"Do you think——"

"No matter what I may think. What one was it?"

Fred remembered that he had counted the panels. He now said:

"It is the fifth from the door."

"Ah! Let us see about it."

Will picked out the panel in question. He tapped it again with his sword-hilt.

It gave forth a hollow sound.

This was nothing unexpected.

Of course it was easy to assume that there was a cavity beyond the panel. He again tested it, to see if it was sliding.

But it would not move. Will then turned to Joe Spotswood.

"Joe," he said, to the young orderly-sergeant, "are you strong enough to force that panel in?"

The orderly-sergeant pressed his shoulder against it. It was of oak and very strong.

But Joe picked up a musket, and dealt the panel a heavy blow with its butt.

A startling thing happened.

The panel, with a click, flew back into the wainscoting. What the young Confederate officer now beheld gave them a wild start.

"Cracky!" exclaimed Fred Randolph.

"Great Cæsar!" gasped Will Prentiss.

A deep niche in the wall was revealed. In this niche stood a young girl, dressed plainly but neatly. She was quite pretty, though pale.

For a moment there was silence. The young Confederate officers stared at the apparition.

It was all plain to Fred, now, that his eyesight had not deceived him a short while before.

Doubtless there had been a crevice in the panel, through which the girl had been peering at him.

But, who was she? What was she doing here? What did it mean?

Here was, indeed, a mystery. Will Prentiss was the first to recover.

"Pardon me!" he said saluting. "May I ask who you are?"

Without losing her composure, though she was very pale, the young girl stepped down into the room and replied:

"I am Alice Lane. My father is Colonel Lane, of the United States army."

"Indeed!" said Will, courteously. "I beg that you will consider us wholly at your service, Miss Lane. But your presence here, in this manner, I must confess, surprises us. Will you accord us an explanation?"

Her face colored a trifle, and her confidence seemed to return.

"I was afraid," she said. "I did not know whether to trust you or not, as you are Confederates."

"So you sought to hide from us?"

"Yes."

"But that only partly explains the mystery. Are you alone here?"

"Oh, yes; all alone."

"But—how came you here?"

"My father's regiment of cavalry was attacked while in bivouac last night and scattered. I became separated from them. I was all night in the dark woods. This morning I found my way thither and sought refuge in this old house. I discovered the secret panel, and when I saw you coming I concealed myself behind it."

Will Prentiss regarded the young girl keenly. There was nothing in her manner or speech to indicate that she told aught but the truth.

It was a remarkable story. But he could see that Miss Lane possessed of more than ordinary self-reliance.

Daughter of a Union colonel, familiar with wild

scenes, and sharing the dangers of camp and field with him, this was not altogether strange.

Will Prentiss became instantly interested in this fugitive Northern girl. He said, courteously:

"Miss Lane, I beg that you will consider yourself our honored guest until such time as I can send you safely back to your father."

Her face lighted up eagerly.

"And you will do that?" she asked.

"I will pledge myself to do so."

Her face heightened in color, and she was now fully restored in confidence.

"I thank you very much," she said. "It is very kind of you."

"I trust you will discover that, though we are Confederates, we are gentlemen."

"I am already assured of that," she said, warmly.

"But you must be fatigued. Those were cramped quarters for you. I will have our cook bring you in some coffee and the best that the larder affords."

Joe Spotswood hastened to do this. Seated at the table before the roaring fire, Alice Lane partook of the repast placed before her.

Will and Fred conversed with her, and learned what they considered many facts of importance.

They learned that Colonel Lane was, like themselves, out on scout duty. But his body of cavalry was much larger than that of the Grays.

"Ugh!" said Will, with a shrug of his shoulders. "I hope we don't run up against your father and his regiment. It would be a hard fight."

The young girl's eyes flashed.

"You might surrender," she laughed. "I would see that you were given just as courteous treatment as you are giving me."

At this both young officers laughed.

To them it was a joke. They saw nothing prophetic in the young Northern girl's declaration. He had no thought of such a possibility of surrendering to Colonel Lane.

"We are in quest of Manuel Laton, the guerilla," said Will. "Can you tell us anything about him?"

Alice Lane gave a start.

"I think I can," she replied. "He is a dark scoundrel."

"That is a fact of which we are well aware. He is supposed to be in the Union service."

"Don't you believe it! That is a subterfuge. He has robbed and hanged as many Union men as he has Confederate. If my father were to capture him he would surely hang him."

"Do you mean that?"

"I do."

"It is a pity, then, that we cannot co-operate, instead of fighting each other."

"Yes," said the Northern girl, impressively. "Which is only another illustration of the fact that this war is a wicked one."

"When your people of the North agree to lay down your arms we will do the same."

"It is quite idle for me to tell you that you are to blame," she said; "and, in fact, it might not be justice. The truth is, both sides are wrong."

"That is certainly a fair and impartial statement. But we must fight it out to the bitter end."

Thus they sat by the fire and chatted. Outside moonlight bathed the landscape. It was an easy night for the picket guard, to whom darkness has terrors.

The hour was eleven, and Will Prentiss and Fred Randolph arose.

"Miss Lane," they said, politely, "this room is yours. We shall bivouac outside with the rest of our boys. You will be warm and comfortable here, and we hope you will rest well. We shall be pleased to see you in the morning."

She smiled and bowed.

"In the morning," she said. "I thank you for your courtesy. I shall hope to see you in the morning."

It seemed to Will Prentiss as if there was a curious significance in her words. He pondered over them for some moments, and then said, when outside:

"What do you think of her, Fred?"

There was an inscrutable light in the young lieutenant's eyes.

"I hardly know what to say," he said. "These Northern girls are so different from our girls. I might think there was something behind all she says that is—well—not exactly sincere."

"Just so," agreed Will. "And yet her story is straightforward. Well, to-morrow we may be able to judge her better."

To-morrow was to bring startling events.

CHAPTER III.

A GREAT SURPRISE.

The two young officers, on the outer porch of the tavern, rolled themselves up in blankets and slept.

They felt secure, for a double line of pickets gave them assurance of ample warning in case of attack.

So neither awoke until daylight came. Will Prentiss aroused himself, and was soon busy with detail work.

Fred awoke a little later.

Neither went into the tavern, but both looked thither often, in hopes of seeing their fair guest appear.

"She was evidently very tired," said Fred. "She is still sleeping."

"I hope she arises soon," said the young captain. "It is about time for us to get a move on."

"I should say so. Why not send the sergeant over to call her?"

"I am surprised, Fred Randolph! That would be exceedingly rude."

So the two young officers waited. But finally Will lost patience.

"I'm awful sorry," he declared. "But I really shall have to disturb her ladyship."

"There is no other way," said Fred. "No doubt she will think us rude."

Just then Joe Spotswood came along. He overheard the last remark.

"Excuse me, captain," he said, "but did I hear you speak of the young woman at the house?"

"Yes," replied Will. "Is she up yet?"

"Up?" exclaimed the orderly-sergeant, in surprise. "Didn't you know that? Why, she's up and gone, two hours ago."

Will Prentiss gave a lightning start, and his face grew pale. Fred Randolph started forward.

"What's that? Gone?"

The sergeant looked surprised.

"Clean gone. Didn't you know it?"

"Where has she gone?"

"Goodness, I don't know! We didn't suppose there was anything wrong about it. You gave no orders to hold her."

This was true enough.

"That's right," said Fred, staring at Will. "But it don't help the case any. Queer what she got out of the way so quick for without waiting to say good-by."

"Well, I should say so!"

To the two boys it was astounding. In fact, it was suspicious. They stared at each other in amazement.

"Maybe it's all right. Perhaps that's the way Northern people do," said Fred. "But in the South you always pay your respects to the host on departure."

Will's face grew white and set.

"There is something wrong," he said. "Send out a detachment. See if she cannot be overtaken."

In a few moments the detail was skurrying out into the country far beyond the picket line.

But, after an hour's quest they returned empty-handed.

The two young Confederate officers were sure, now, that they had been hoodwinked, and that the mysterious Northern girl was a spy.

And a clever one at that. Her method showed nerve and shrewdness.

She had appeared just at daybreak at the corral and called for a spare horse. A few words with the quartermaster convinced him that Will Prentiss had directed her to select a horse from the led horses of the troop.

She had then mounted and rode past the picket guard. No orders had been given to prevent any one from going beyond the picket line.

So she had made her escape. Any effort to overtake her was now futile.

To Will Prentiss it was a decided shock. He caused the old tavern to be thoroughly ransacked.

Beyond the secret, moving panel in the tap room and the niche it revealed was a secret chamber.

It held nothing of importance, however, so the quest was abandoned. But Will Prentiss felt sure that the mysterious girl was a spy.

"Well, she fooled us all right," declared Fred Randolph. "I must say, I was never more taken in in my life."

"Nor I!" agreed Will. "But you may be sure I'll not be fooled that way again."

"Do you think we can believe any part of her story, that she is the daughter of Colonel Lane?"

"Perhaps not!"

But daylight was at hand, and the Grays prepared to move on.

The scout, Nelson, had been out for some time, looking about the country, and now returned with an interesting report.

"I think I have got a clew as to the whereabouts of Manuel Laton," he said.

"Good!" cried Will, with delight. "I hope that is true."

"I cannot be sure, but a country boy below here told me that a troop of men answering the description of guerillas passed over the Long bridge two hours ago."

"The Long bridge?"

"Yes, a bridge across Long creek. It is about two miles from here."

"In what direction were they going?"

"North, I think."

Will was thoughtful a moment.

"Mount the company," he said. "We will ride that way."

The Grays were quickly in saddle. They rode away with Will Prentiss at the head.

It was not long before they had galloped to the Long bridge. They crossed it and got a fresh clew.

This was in the shape of a straggler, whose horse had given out and who had been left behind.

He was captured by Joe Spotswood, who brought him in. At once Will proceeded to catechise him.

At first the fellow would not admit that he belonged to Laton's troop.

But finally he broke down and made confession.

"Yes," he admitted. "I'm one of Laton's men. But I've quit ther service, and I want go home."

"That will depend upon truthful answers to my questions," said Will. "It will pay you to tell us all. Where is Laton bound?"

"I dunno! He was ridin' north when I left him."

"All right," said the boy captain. "Take him under that tree over there, sergeant, and hang him."

Spotswood stepped forward. But the guerilla broke down in terror.

"I'll tell!" he yelled. "Don't hang me! I'll tell ye!"

"Be quick, then!" said Will, sternly. "My time is valuable."

"Will ye let me go free if I'll tell ye?" asked the prisoner.

"We will if what you say proves to be the truth."

"Wall, I swear to it."

"We'll set you free as soon as we are convinced that you have told the truth."

The guerilla then broke out:

"Manuel is on his way to the plantation of Joe Benton, four miles north of hyar. He is goin' to raid an' burn it. He says that he has Pope's orders ter do it, but thet's a darn lie. Pope would hang him if he could get him."

"Four miles from here," said Will, as he drew a quick breath. "Was Laton and his troop well mounted?"

"I reckon not. His horses are short of feed an' pooty tired."

"Then we'll ride and get there!" cried Will. "Mind you, if we find you have lied to us you shall hang."

"I'll swar by ther saints!"

But Will had turned to the troop, and at once gave the order:

"Forward, Grays! Gallop!"

The command was instantly obeyed. The troop proceeded to gallop.

It was a furious ride that followed.

Over the highway they sped, up hill and down dale, until the miles had sped past, and suddenly they saw against the sky a column of smoke:

"We're too late!" cried Fred Randolph. "Do you see, Will? They have fired the farm buildings!"

But Will Prentiss sat harder in his saddle and cried:

"Forward, Grays! We must get there!"

The little company rode harder. On they flew, until, bursting through a grove of trees, they came full upon the scene.

There was the burning mansion. About it were grouped the guerillas in squads. They were dividing up their plunder.

Will Prentiss did not stop to consider the odds. He did not reckon the disparity of numbers.

He sat down hard and, whirling his sword aloft, shouted:

"At them, Grays! Eat 'em up!"

With a wild cheer the Grays put spurs to their horses and dashed on. Like a thunderbolt they swept down upon the guerillas.

The lawless crew were astounded at the unexpected attack. For a moment they were utterly demoralized.

Then they tried to rally and made a resistance. But the Grays struck them like a thunderbolt.

Backward they were hurled. Sabres flashed, pistols cracked and for a time the wildest confusion ensued.

There could be but one result.

The guerillas were swept back and scattered. Though they outnumbered the Grays, they could not stand their ground.

In a few brief moments the desperate fight was over.

Such of the guerillas as were mounted managed to escape. But over a score were made prisoners.

Will Prentiss tried hard to get sight of the leader, Manuel Laton.

But he was not once visible. If he was a member of the party he kept out of sight in some mysterious way.

Pursuit of the scattered guerillas was not profitable, so Will called his men back and proceeded to simply take possession of the plantation.

But there was little that could be saved. The plantation house was in flames. To the branch of a tree in the garden the proprietor of the place had been hung.

The scene was a most despairing one. The fiends had looted the place before firing it.

Bodies of other members of the family and of servants were scattered about. It was a hideous outrage.

But the leader of this band of outlaws, the man responsible for all, had managed to escape.

This was greatly to be regretted. But yet it could not be helped, as Will Prentiss well knew.

"Too bad," said Nelson, the scout. "I tried to get sight of Manuel, but he was not in the bunch."

"It don't seem to me as if his whole command was here," said Fred.

Will turned to the guerilla prisoner and asked: "Was Manuel with the party?"

The prisoner nodded.

"He was," he replied. "But he cleared out the moment ye charged. I seen him just jump his hoss over that five-barred fence down yender. You bet he ain't goin' to be took when he knows durned well thet it will be death."

The guerilla chief had escaped. That was all there was to it.

Of course the boys were disappointed, but they could only make the best of it and hope for better luck.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SCOUT.

Will Prentiss hardly knew what to do with the prisoners he had taken.

He did not want to hang them. It was too much like slaughter, though they might deserve it, for a worse lot of rascals never lived.

Finally Will decided to parole them. He knew well enough the parole would be broken.

But no other disposition could be made of them just then. The Grays were short of rations and the prisoners must be fed.

It was impossible to send them to a prison camp. So Will practically set them free.

"After all," he said, "they're not our game. If we get their leader that is all we want."

Nothing could be done to save the plantation. As long as the owner was dead, there was no use in such a course had it been possible.

So Will ordered the Grays to go on in pursuit of the guerilla chief. The little company rode away.

They had not gone a mile from the plantation, however, when a startling sound came to their ears.

It was the distant rattle of musketry. Some sort of battle was raging not a half mile in their front.

"What is going on over there?" asked Will as Nelson, the scout, rode up.

"Well," said the scout, "I'm sure I don't know. I fancy it is a fight."

"We must ascertain."

"Shall I go ahead and reconnoiter?"

"You may do so, and we will come along after you."

The scout rode away at full speed. The Grays went forward at a gallop.

Will Prentiss did not proceed without caution. He had no idea of going blindly into a trap.

But suddenly mounting a rise, they had a good view of a valley beyond. What they saw was comprehensive.

The Grays halted a moment. Will saw Nelson, the scout, coming back toward him.

"It is an attack on one of our outposts," he said. "A whole Union regiment is trying to carry it."

"Indeed," cried the boy captain. "I think we had better take a hand in it."

"If you want to assist our comrades I think a flank attack right from this point will do it."

"Very well," agreed the boy captain. "Forward, Grays!"

The little company of Confederates, with a ringing cheer, spurred their horses forward. Down into the valley they went.

It was but a few moments before they came in sight of the battle.

A small company of Confederates on the hillside were trying to defend the outpost against a heavy body of Union infantry.

The fight was waxing hot. The Confederate boys had the advantage of being intrenched. But they were outnumbered.

Doubtless they would eventually have been overpowered. But suddenly the Union soldiers saw a squad of cavalry bearing down upon their left flank.

There was an attempt to change front.

But before this could be done the Grays were upon them. There was a desperate hand-to-hand fight.

For a few moments it was stubborn, but the Confederate boys in the trenches now came down with a bayonet charge.

This turned the tide.

The Union regiment broke and fell back. The Grays charged them again, but after that Will drew back and allowed them to retreat.

The young captain had relieved the outpost. To continue the slaughter would avail nothing.

So the Grays drew back and Will met the captain of the post, whose name was Lockhart.

"I am glad to meet you, Captain Prentiss," he cried heartily. "I have heard much of you. I will say that you arrived in time to save us."

"I am very glad of that," said Will. "They made a good fight."

"Yes, but your boys fight like demons."

"They fight well."

"Indeed they do. But have you heard the news?"

"What?"

"Jackson has met with a temporary defeat. Our army has halted in its advance."

This was news to Will.

"That report cannot be true."

"I have it on good authority."

"Well, that is only temporary?"

"I believe so. But it means that this outpost, as well as others, will be in danger until Jackson advances again. I do know that Lane's cavalry is just beyond here."

Will gave a start. The mention of Lane's name called to mind the incident of the girl spy.

"Who has given you all this information?" he asked.

"Langley, one of our spies. There he is yonder."

Will glanced in the direction indicated. He saw that Langley, the spy, was a small effeminate-looking man, with a tuft of black beard on his chin.

His face was exceedingly fair. Something about him interested Will.

"Call him over," he said. "I'd like to talk with him."

"Langley!" called the post captain; "come here a moment."

The scout turned and gave a start as he glanced at Will. But he came up with a curious mincing gait.

"I make you acquainted with Captain Prentiss," said Lockhart.

"I am glad to meet you, captain," said Langley in a quavering voice. "You made a great charge a little while ago."

"Yes," replied Will. "Lockhart tells me that Jackson has had a setback."

"Only temporary, I believe. He will no doubt recover his ground to-morrow."

"Certainly he will. Have you just come from his camp?"

"I have."

"Ah! Can you tell me if Colonel Joe English and his regiment are yet with Jackson?"

The scout looked at Will through half-shut eyes. The young captain was curiously impressed.

Somewhere before he had seen those eyes. He tried to remember.

"I do not know Colonel English," replied Langley. "I cannot tell you."

"Are you not in the regular service?"

Will did not know just why he asked the question. He knew that every secret service agent or scout held a commission signed by President Davis.

Something had made him suspicious of this man Langley and he could not tell why Langley flushed and made reply:

"I am a legally authorized agent of the Confederate Government. Here is my paper."

He drew the document from his pocket. Will glanced at it and saw that it was in regular form.

It was signed by the President and commissioned Joseph Langley to act as scout and spy for the Confederate Government.

The boy captain was forced to regard it as all regular enough. But still he regarded Langley as a curious fellow.

It was some moments later that Will met Jack Nelson.

The scout had just come in from a trip out beyond the lines. He accosted Will eagerly:

"Well, Captain Prentiss," he said, "the coast looks clear hereabouts. But I cannot tell what may develop in a few hours from now."

"Your story does not agree with Langley's."

"Who?"

"Langley."

Nelson looked surprised.

"Who is Langley?" he asked.

"He is Captain Lockhart's scout. He reports that Col-

onel Lane, with his cavalry, is but a short distance above here."

Nelson looked perplexed.

"Langley," he replied. "I knew Joe Langley, the scout. Can it be he?"

"His name is Joseph Langley. He holds a commission from President Davis."

"Where is he?"

"He was about here a moment ago."

But the scout had disappeared. Will could see nothing of him. But Nelson was interested.

"If it is Joe Langley," he said, "I am interested. We were old friends and have done good work together. I would like to see him much."

"Come with me, and we will try and find him."

They strolled away together. Following the trenches they came suddenly to a group of officers who were studying the country with their glasses.

With them Will distinguished the slender, effeminate figure of the scout.

"There he is," he said. "We can interview him now."

Nelson looked eagerly about.

"Where is he?"

"Yonder! That little man, with the heavy slouch hat. Do you see him?"

"That fellow?" exclaimed the scout. "He is not Langley!"

Will Prentiss gave a start.

"Not Langley?"

"No."

"Why, he certainly is. He has his commission duly signed by President Davis."

Nelson rubbed his eyes.

"I think I ought to know Joe Langley," he said, "and I don't think there is another Langley in the spy service. Let us see what he has to say."

It is hardly necessary to say that this was all a revelation to Will Prentiss and caused him to do some thinking.

But he accompanied Nelson to the spot where the officers stood. Langley turned and regarded them.

But there was no glance of recognition between them. Will walked up and said:

"Langley, permit me to introduce to you Mr. Jack Nelson, a scout in our service. At first he claimed to know you. But he declares you are not the Joe Langley he knows."

The scout's face did not change in its expression, but he grew a trifle paler.

"I am glad to know Mr. Nelson," he said.

"Yes," said Nelson, with a searching look at the other. "It strikes me as curious that you should bear the same name as my friend and that you should be also a scout."

"There are many curious coincidences to be met with in this life," said Langley, with curling lip. "I don't know that I ever heard of you."

"That is very curious, as I know about every scout in the service. When did you take up the calling?"

Langley's face flushed.

"Before I answer I would like to know why that should concern you?"

"Well, I will tell you," said Nelson bluntly. "You will pardon me for any suspicions I may have, but it certainly seems odd that my partner, Joe Langley, should have a namesake in the service. And you are physically his opposite."

"Perhaps you think I am masquerading in his name?" asked Langley.

"Really I cannot make that assertion, though I am certainly curious. Would you mind letting me see your commission? Here is mine."

Langley hesitated. A red spot of anger had appeared on each cheek.

"I showed my commission to your captain there. I don't know why I should show it to you."

"You will please us greatly by doing so," said Will firmly.

With this, the scout drew the paper from his pocket. The moment Nelson's eyes rested upon it he gave a start and his face paled.

He grasped the document and glared at the other.

"Where did you get this paper?" he demanded sternly. "Who are you?"

Langley affected indignation.

"What do you mean?"

"Just this, and nothing less, I recognize this paper as the property of Joe Langley. I know that you are not Joe Langley. You are an impostor and a spy. Captain Prentiss, put this man under arrest."

CHAPTER V.

HEMMED IN.

To say that Will Prentiss was astounded would be a mild statement. The boy captain was for a moment unable to act.

The scout Langley had turned ghastly pale and was trembling in every limb. His breast was heaving violently.

"I deny the accusation," he said. "Captain Prentiss, this man is mad. He is actuated by professional jealousy."

But Will signalled Spotswood and a couple of privates, and they came running up. The prisoner seemed about to collapse.

"This is unjust," he cried. "I will report the matter to President Davis."

"President Davis shall certainly hear of it," promised Nelson. "Now let us see how much of a disguise you have."

He stepped forward and pulled gently on the black goatee worn by the prisoner. An astounding thing happened.

It came off.

The scout then removed the prisoner's hat. A wealth of nut-brown hair fell down her back. The supposed scout was a woman.

And in that moment recognition brought a startled cry from the lips of the boy captain:

"Great Caesar! It is Miss Lane!"

It was indeed the girl spy, the Union colonel's daughter, whom the Grays had found secreted in the old cross roads tavern.

It was a clever game she had been playing, and she would have played it to a successful end but for the shrewdness of Jack Nelson.

Miss Lane broke down and confessed all.

She had secured the scout's commission from Langley himself, who was now a prisoner in the Union camp. But she said:

"You have got me, but too late to thwart my plans. These were to decoy Lockhart and his command into a trap which would force them to surrender. To this extent I have succeeded. You are all in a trap at this moment and escape is impossible. A heavy force surrounds you and you will be forced to surrender."

There was a little ring of triumph in her voice as she proclaimed this.

But of course it was not accepted as a certainty. Not one of the Grays would believe that they could not fight their way out.

"You certainly deceived us well at the tavern, Miss Lane," said Will. "I never dreamed that you were a spy."

She smiled and said:

"I have been very successful in my work. I have deceived your best generals."

"But you have at last fallen a victim to your own game."

"That is but temporary unless you decide to shoot me," she said.

"That is the usual fate of a spy."

"Well, I do not fear death."

"But we shall not shoot you."

"I knew you would not," she said with a laugh. "I know the deep respect you Southerners have for my sex."

"You say we are surrounded and that we will be attacked?"

"That is true."

"We are able to make a most desperate resistance. Moreover Jackson's whole army is within easy march."

"Ah, but our right wing has intervened. You are absolutely cut off. Escape is impossible."

She spoke with such profound certainty that Will Prentiss was impressed, but he made reply:

"I am sorry to say that I cannot send you with an escort to the Union lines. I am compelled to hold you a prisoner."

"Very well," she replied serenely. "I must submit. I suppose. But I shall not long remain a prisoner."

She was led away to the trenches and placed under guard. Perhaps the most surprised of any was Lockhart.

"That beats me," declared the captain of the post. "I had absolute confidence in Langley. And to think that he was a female spy!"

"Many curious things are happening," said Nelson. "But I thought it mighty queer that Joe Langley should wear number four shoes and walk like a woman. Why, Joe weighs two hundred and has a number nine foot."

"Do you think she tells the truth when she says we are surrounded?"

"I don't know."

"It may be that she wants to bluff us."

"Perhaps so."

"At any rate," said Will Prentiss, "if I were you, Lockhart, I would make my defenses as strong as possible."

"What?" asked the captain of the post. "Are you not going to stay with us?"

"I hardly think so. We are ordered to track down Manuel Laton, you know."

"Oh, I see. Well, I wish you success."

"Thank you."

It was Will Prentiss' purpose now to go on with the Grays. If he should meet with opposition he could at least fall back and rejoin Lockhart.

So the Grays were ordered to fall in, and they soon were in line of march. Of course, the captured girl spy was left in Lockhart's hands.

The Grays were soon marching away, and finally came into the highway. But they had not proceeded half a mile when a vidette came riding back quickly.

"Captain Prentiss," he said, "the enemy are in great force directly ahead."

At once Will turned to Fred Randolph and said:

"Fred, order the company to halt. We will ride forward and reconnoiter."

The order was obeyed.

Nearby was a high eminence. Will and Fred quickly galloped to the summit of this.

From it they had a wide view of the country. They could see the trenches of Captain Lockhart's command. They also saw now a startling state of affairs.

They discovered that the assertion made by Miss Lane that they were surrounded by the Union forces was not far wrong.

To the south below Lockhart's camp a long line of Union blue could be seen. To the north also columns of blue were visible. To the east it was the same. It was only the western horizon that was clear.

Will Prentiss took in the situation at a glance.

"By jingo! They have us well hemmed in, Fred."

"I should say so."

"The outlook is dubious."

"That is right. By good rights I suppose we ought to go back and assist Lockhart in his defense."

"But we shall have to abandon our plan of hunting down Laton. Lockhart is sure to be captured."

"You are right there," agreed Will. "On the whole, little would be gained for him and everything would be lost for us."

"So it would."

"We will not go back."

"But—"

"What?"

"What shall we do? Can we hope to escape from this and ourselves?"

"There is only one chance that I can see, and that is to ride westward as fast as we can. Get as far in that direction as possible before they close in."

"We must lose no time."

"No."

At once the two young officers galloped back. Nelson, the scout, met them.

"Well, what is the decision?" he asked.

"We are going to ride westward," replied Will.

"You think that is the best plan?"

"I see no other."

"You may be right," said the scout, "but do you know I have a feeling that the game is up."

"We'll not admit that yet," said Will.

At once the orders were given and the Grays galloped across the country. They were obliged at times to pull down fences and ford streams. But they kept on for what seemed an hour.

Then they rode up the side of an eminence. Looking back, Will Prentiss could see the flank of the line of Union soldiers to the north.

He was satisfied they were outside the circle and he said:

"I think we're all right now, Nelson."

"I hope so," replied the scout. "What is the move now, captain?"

"Well," said Will reflectively. "I believe it is our best plan to try and reach Jackson and take the news to him. Certainly Lockhart ought to be saved."

"Very good! Let us go on!"

The Grays once more galloped on. But a mile further on they came to a railroad. Will Prentiss drew rein and looked down the embankment long since divested of its rails.

But as he glanced along the embankment he was given a sudden start. Two hundred yards away was the forest on either side of the railroad.

Here the railroad left the embankment and entered the forest. Out of the forest on one side of this cut came a file of men.

Their purpose was to cross the railroad. But the leaders at sight of the Grays at once drew rein.

For one moment Will stared at them. Then he gave a great cry.

"By Jingo! It is Manuel Laton and his guerillas!"

A great cry went up from the Grays. It was a cry of exultation.

"Hooray!" tried Joe Spottswood. "There they are, captain. The very chaps we are looking for."

"That's right," cried Fred Randolph; "the very chaps we are looking for."

Will Prentiss' eyes kindled at the sight. Drawing his sword, he shouted:

"Forward, Grays! Charge!"

With a rousing cheer, the Grays dashed forward. They rose in their saddles and brandished their sabres.

The guerilla chief, Laton himself, was seen for a moment. Then the railroad cut seemed to swarm with the savage guerillas.

CHAPTER VI.

IN HARD LUCK.

Will Prentiss was in the lead as the Grays swept down to the attack. Had the young captain been aware of the real

state of affairs he might not have ordered the headlong charge.

He had no idea the foe were so strong and that the nature of the ground was so much in their favor.

As it was, a destructive volley smote the little cavalcade.

Some of the horses went down. Six of the little company were killed instantly.

Will Prentiss lost his horse and on foot in the midst of the tangle gave the order to fall back.

The Grays dismounted and hastily sent their horses to the rear, taking a position behind the embankment.

Then with their carbines they opened a hot fire.

The guerillas are never given to fighting a battle. Their policy is to strike a blow and dash away.

So Will was not surprised when they fell back, and presently the firing entirely ceased.

The Grays now charged on foot and captured the cut. But beyond a few bodies no trace of the guerillas could be found.

They had mounted and dashed away. Will Prentiss was chagrined.

It could not be said that the Grays had received the best of the encounter. They had indeed got the worst of it.

They had lost six of their men, and fully a dozen horses. They had gained practically nothing.

"It is certainly hard luck," said Fred Randolph, after the cut had been captured. "They had us at a disadvantage."

"So they did," said Will; "but now it is up to us to run them down."

"Can we do it?"

"We must!"

The Grays mounted and sped through the cut. Beyond was dense woods. They followed a narrow path through the woods.

It was easy enough to trail the guerillas. Finally they emerged into the open country. Then Will Prentiss saw the foe not more than half a mile away and trying to tear up a bridge over a deep stream and thus block pursuit.

It fired the young captain's blood and he shouted:

"Forward, Grays! We must get them."

With a cheer the little company dashed forward. But even at that moment the last timber of the bridge fell into the water.

The guerillas with derisive yells now mounted and dashed away. The Grays drew rein on the banks of the stream.

Will had thought of swimming the horses across. But he was deterred from this by the muddy character of the banks.

The horses would be almost certain to be mired. The project was abandoned.

It looked now as if Laton and his gang were sure to escape. It is hardly necessary to say that the Grays were deeply chagrined.

"Hang it!" exclaimed the young captain in discomfiture, "they are sure to give us the slip. We are out of luck."

"So it would seem," said Nelson. "But don't get discouraged, captain."

"I'll try not to. But can you tell me how we will cross this stream?"

"It is a problem!"

"Is there any other bridge within a reasonable distance?"

"Not to my knowledge!"

Will dismounted and walked down upon the bridge abutments. It was plainly an impossibility to cross at that point.

To rebuild the bridge was not feasible. Laton had given them the slip.

There was nothing left but to submit to the unkind fate. But Will Prentiss smote his hands together and cried:

"Very well! He has given us the slip this time. But there is another time coming. I am determined to hang that rascal at any cost."

As the river could not be crossed at this point, Will decided to ride southward to a point some miles below, where it was said to be possible to ford it.

The Grays rode on at a slower pace. The young captain was not in an agreeable frame of mind.

"We seem to be playing in hard luck, Will," said Fred Randolph.

"So we are, Fred."

"I am sorry that fellow escaped."

"You are not so sorry as I am."

"Well, he is on the other side and getting every moment further away from the Union lines. We ought to be able to get him the easier for that."

"Perhaps so. But we have got to cross the river ourselves first."

The Grays had indeed played in hard luck. But they little dreamed that harder luck yet was in store for them.

Will Prentiss in all his moves never lacked caution.

He was sure to have out a good vidette force in travelling through an unknown region. It had many times prevented their walking into a death trap or an ambush.

In the present case it counted. Suddenly they were heard in the distance. A vidette came riding in.

"A heavy Union force is in front of us," he declared. "They seem to be advancing at the double quick."

"How strong are they?" asked Will.

"I should think there were two regiments of them."

"Whew!" exclaimed Nelson. "Two thousand men in front of us. I think we better fall back, captain."

"By all means."

The order was given and the Grays proceeded to retreat. They fell back now rapidly.

But suddenly shots were heard in their rear. An alarming fact became apparent that they were hemmed in on that side.

"What does it mean?" cried Fred Randolph. "Where did so many Yankees come from all at once?"

This was a question not easy to answer. That the force on hand and in overwhelming force was enough.

Will Prentiss acted with rare promptitude. He gave the order to move by the flank. A few hundred yards to the right they came to a small clearing.

On it was an abandoned lime kiln. The ground and excavation found an admirable place for a position.

Quickly the little company crept into this harbor of refuge. They were not a moment too soon.

The foe burst from the woods and advanced at the charge. Will Prentiss gave the order to fire by volley.

This checked the attack and sent the foe skurrying back to cover. For a time no further attack was made.

But Will Prentiss quickly became aware of an appalling fact.

This was that the foe were closing in about them in overpowering numbers. Suddenly from the woods he saw a white flag approach.

It was carried by a Union sergeant. Will went out to meet the truce-bearer.

The sergeant handed him a bit of note paper on which was written with a pencil:

"To Captain Prentiss:

"You are quite surrounded by a force ten times your own. To resist will mean useless slaughter. We are willing to treat you as prisoners of war, and all due courtesy will be shown you personally if you see fit to surrender. My daughter, who is with me, sends you her compliments and trusts that you will avert bloodshed.

"Very respectfully, WILLIAM LANE, Col. U. S. Cavalry."

Will Prentiss was not a little surprised. So Colonel Lane had in turn been chasing him.

What was more, he had surrounded him. The situation was awkward for the Grays.

It also taught Will the startling fact that Lockhart must have been captured and his fair prisoner, the girl spy, rescued by her father.

For some moments Will Prentiss was in a complete quandary. He could not bear to think of surrender.

It was his impulse to fight. Perhaps even now reinforcements might be at hand.

It he could hold Lane at bay for a while rescue might come. There was always a chance. The chances of war were exceeding many.

So he said: "Return to Colonel Lane and tell him that we have not yet demonstrated his ability to capture us. We will not surrender."

The truce-bearer departed. Will went back into the lime pits.

"Well," asked Nelson, the scout, with pallid face, "what the word, captain?"

"It is Colonel Lane who surrounds us."

"The danger!"

"He demands our surrender."

"Did you accede?"

"No."

The scout's face was haggard and the light in his eyes was dim.

"I don't know, Prentiss," he said; "I am afraid it is going to go hard with us."

Will's jaw set hard.

"No true soldier will surrender until he is driven to the last ditch."

"That is true. But our case would seem to be almost as desperate as that."

"If the majority of the Grays vote to surrender I will consent," said Will.

But when the question was put to the brave little company the reply was made:

"No; we will fight to the last."

So at once the battle was reopened. Never to his dying day will Will Prentiss forget that desperate fight in the lime kiln. Eight times the overpowering columns of the Union forces charged.

Eight times the Grays riddled them with bullets and hurled them back with the bayonet. The white lime trenches were like a shambles, so red with blood were they.

Heaps of bodies were in them. One-third of the brave little company had laid down their lives when darkness came.

With nightfall the enemy drew off.

Their attack had been desperate. The defense had been heroic.

If the defenders had lost, the attacking force had lost ten times as many. The ground below the pits was lined with dead men.

Fred Randolph had a scalp wound. Joe Spotswood had a bullet wound in the shoulder.

Brave Corporal Sam Payton had been killed. The very flower of the little company had succumbed.

It made Will Prentiss sick at heart. He saw nothing ahead but defeat.

To resist much longer meant total extinction. Yet not one in the brave little company thought of surrender.

The Union line had fallen back. The blaze of their camp fires could be seen. They were recuperating.

They would resume the attack on the morrow. What would be the result?

To Will Prentiss there could be but one answer. The Grays had exhausted their rations.

Hunger was already upon them. What was worse was the fact that only another round of ammunition was left.

After this had been fired they would have only the bayonet left. The cold steel was a thing to be dreaded. But the foe were yet in overpowering numbers.

CHAPTER VII.

A DARING ESCAPE.

"Prentiss," said Nelson, the scout, "do you know that there are no rations?"

"I do."

"Are you aware that only one round of ammunition is left?"

"I am."

"You have made a brave fight. There is no dishonor in surrender now."

Will Prentiss bowed.

"I am aware of that," he said. "But we can hold our position here until morning without trouble. Then, if relief does not come and it is necessary, we will yield."

"For the sake of humanity?"

"Yes."

"Prentiss, give me your hand," said the scout. "You

are a brave officer. You are worthy of a higher office. Your little company is almost wiped out."

There were tears in the young captain's eyes.

"I am aware of that," he said. "I know what you mean. The South is drained of her youths. The Virginia Grays can never regain their personnel."

"They have had an illustrious career. It will be a page in history to which every Southerner can turn without shame."

"I hope so, Nelson."

"I know it. Now, Will, surrender will of course wipe out the Grays as a military organization. But do not let that discourage you. You will be exchanged. I hope to see you on General Lee's staff."

A spasm of pain contracted the boy captain's features.

"Do not speak of that yet, Nelson," he said. "But I will say that if the Grays are wiped out I shall still remain in the service."

"Good! I feel sure that you will be of great value in another capacity."

"But I have not given up hope," said the boy captain. "You know that Jackson may come at any moment."

"I know, my boy."

So all that night Will Prentiss walked the parapet. He tried to think of a way to escape.

He had half resolved to risk all in one final dash to break the surrounding line of foes.

A rush, a volley and a bayonet charge might carry them through. But what then?

They would only be enveloped again and perhaps annihilated.

There was another point of view.

What right had he to sacrifice the lives of his comrades in a hopeless combat? It would seem like murder.

Would it not be more humane to surrender, now that it had been proved that he could not win victory? The last ditch had been reached.

Morning came and Will Prentiss, pale and haggard, looked from the eminence to every point of the compass. He saw no advancing columns of gray, no sign of a rescue.

Just then again he saw the truce-bearer coming. This time two others accompanied him.

One was a tall, handsome man in colonel's uniform. The other was a young girl. It was Colonel Lane and his daughter.

Will went down to meet them.

The Union colonel saluted. Will answered the salute and bowed to Alice. The girl spy's face was flushed and her eyes glistened.

"Captain Prentiss," said Colonel Lane, "it does me good to shake hands with a brave man."

"I thank you, sir," replied Will. "I have but done my duty. If I have done wrong in this sacrifice of life, it has been without that consciousness."

"You have made a very brave resistance," declared the colonel, "and you are entitled to great credit. But it would seem as if the limit had been reached."

"We are still able to resist."

"Undoubtedly, and we are yet able to attack. But I am

reluctant to order the extermination of so plucky a little band. I will offer you the best terms of surrender that I am able to."

Will was silent a moment.

"It is no dishonor, Captain Prentiss," said Alice Lane.

Will felt a great lump in his throat. He felt that with that surrender came the end of the Virginia Grays.

But he saw the utter uselessness of further resistance. It was folly. He at once decided.

"Colonel Lane," he said, "I surrender to you."

The Union colonel bowed gravely, but made a deprecatory gesture as Will started to unbuckle his sword.

"That is not necessary," he said. "You and your officers may retain their sidearms. You shall be subjected to no indignity. Be assured that we can be generous to a brave foe."

"You are very generous," said Will. "I will return and march my company out."

"Very well."

Will Prentiss, with bowed head and sad heart, went back to the trenches. He did not need to tell his decision.

The boys removed their caps and gave a silent salute.

Then, in low suppressed tones, the orders were given. The little remnant of the Grays marched out of the lime kiln with colors reversed. They marched silently down the slope.

There was but a handful of them. The heart of the boy captain was quite full as he gazed upon them.

Fred Randolph, Lieutenant Gray and Nelson, the scout, with Joe Spotswood, stood at one side and watched the boys as they marched by.

"It's all over, Will," said Fred Randolph. "It looks as if we would never be able to get the Grays together again."

"You have nothing to reproach yourselves for," said Nelson. "You have won glory and success. Your career has been a brilliant one."

"I have never felt until this moment the possibility of defeat for the South," said Will.

"We will not admit that," said Fred Randolph. "Cheer up, captain. We shall yet be fighting for the Confederacy."

The Virginia Grays laid down their guns and were marched to the rear. The surrender was complete.

Arrangements were quickly made for the transportation of the Grays to the North. A heavy guard was detailed to march them away to Washington.

The officers Colonel Lane held for later transportation. In the meantime a courier arrived with the news that Jackson's advance was but a mile away.

This news reached the ears of the young Confederates.

Will's veins tingled.

"That's too bad," he said. "We made a mistake, boys. If we could have held off a few hours longer——"

"Don't you believe it," cried Nelson. "You could not have resisted another assault, Will. We did the very best thing we could in surrendering."

But Colonel Lane now detached his cavalry for a dash along the front of Jackson's advance. This left the prisoners in the hands of Major Benton, of the infantry.

"Major Benton will detail a mounted guard to take you

to Washington later in the day," said Colonel Lane. "No doubt arrangements will be quickly made for your exchange."

Then the colonel and his command rode away. With him went the pretty female spy, his daughter, Alice.

The Virginia Grays had indeed met with hard luck.

But now that it was all over, there came a reaction.

The spirits of the boy captain began to rise again. He saw that there was yet brave work for him to do for the Confederacy.

An hour later the distant boom of guns was heard, indicating that Jackson was advancing. It made the veins of the young Confederates tingle.

They would have given much for their liberty at that moment to take part in the distant conflict.

But they were prisoners of war.

Major Benton now appeared and said:

"Gentlemen, I have detailed a mounted guard to take you to Washington, where you will be turned over to the United States Provost Marshal. You will be treated as your rank deserves, and I wish you good success."

"Thank you," said Will Prentiss.

A few moments later a guard of a score of mounted men dashed up. They were in command of a fiery young officer, Lieutenant Nagle.

The four prisoners were mounted and then the cavalcade rode away. Soon they were galloping over the Maryland highways eastward bound.

For an hour they rode on in silence. No sign of a Confederate foe was to be seen. Indeed it was hardly to be expected that any would be found in this locality.

But, as the hour was noon, Lieutenant Nagle drew rein and gave the command to halt.

At once the cavalcade drew up. At the moment they were on the bank of a small stream which trickled its shallow way down through a run.

Quickly the party proceeded to unsaddle their horses and prepare for the resting spell. The prisoners were left almost unguarded.

Nelson, the scout, who was near Will Prentiss, now whispered:

"I say, captain, this is an excellent chance for us to escape."

"Escape?"

Will gave a start. The thought had not come to him before. It for a moment startled him.

Liberty is ever dear. The thought of being carried to the Union camp a prisoner was by no means a pleasant one.

The young captain's nerves were instantly on the alert.

"What's that, Nelson?" he whispered. "Do you mean it?"

"I do," said the scout shrewdly. "These fellows evidently think that we would not dare make the attempt."

"They do not know us."

"Indeed they do not. What do you think of the plan?"

"Certainly we will try it. Speak to the other boys."

A few moments' whispered consultation resulted in a definite plan. Fred Randolph and Lieutenant Gray were ready and eager.

The plan was a daring one, but the young prisoners knew that liberty was well worth the attempt.

The guard had tethered their horses after unsaddling them. Only two men were guarding the prisoners. The others were fifty yards away. Their carbines were staked in the edge of the woods.

Watching the chance, Nelson gave the signal. Quick as a flash there was a concerted rush upon the two guards. Unsuspecting so daring an attack, they were unready and taken off their guard.

Will Prentiss dealt the one nearest him a terrific blow, which felled him unconscious.

Nelson, the scout, had sprung upon the other. The next moment the way was clear for the escape.

CHAPTER VIII.

FUGITIVES.

But this daring attempt to gain their freedom by the five prisoners was marked by one tragedy. Will Prentiss had felled one of the two guards.

The other, attacked by Nelson, had swung about and fired his carbine.

The bullet pierced the brain of Lieutenant Gray. The next moment the guard was knocked senseless.

There was no time for the escaping prisoners to express their sorrow for the sad fate of Gray. All depended upon quick action.

They sprung away like greyhounds and the next moment were in the underbrush.

The Union guard, under Major Benton, came running up from the creek. But the prisoners were far into the dense woods.

On they ran with Joe Spotswood in the lead. The orderly sergeant was an expert at running.

After him came Nelson, then Will Prentiss, and Fred Randolph was in the rear. They ran until Fred gasped weakly.

"Good-bye, fellows; I'm done out."

And he sank down overcome by the force of his exertions. But the others came to a halt also.

"Go on," breathed the young lieutenant. "Don't mind me. Make your escape. It don't matter about me."

"Not much," growled Joe Spotswood as he picked the young lieutenant up and threw him over his back as if he had been a sack of wood. "If you don't go with us, we stay. That's all."

"I don't think there is anything further to fear," declared Nelson. "Listen, can you hear them?"

In the far distance faint sounds were heard. But they seemed to vanish to the westward. It told the fugitives an important truth.

This was evidently that the pursuers had lost the track. For the nonce they were certainly safe.

"They have lost us," whispered Will, with a breath of relief. "We're all right, boys."

"At least we can rest for a while."

"Yes."

So they cast themselves down upon the ground and

waited. Fred quickly recovered now, for his exhaustion was only temporary. He arose and said:

"I am ready to go on."

"Where are we?" asked Spotswood.

"That is a question," said Nelson. "I am not so very familiar with this region."

"Well, we're in luck certainly," said Will Prentiss. "We have gained our liberty. Now, if we can only manage to get back to Jackson's lines we will yet figure in this game of war."

"What a grand thing it would be if we could get a detachment and rescue the Grays before they could get into the Union prison," said Fred.

"Their rescue will be only a question of a few weeks anyway," declared Joe Spotswood. "You'll see General Lee in Philadelphia before the year is out and then the Confederacy will have its rights."

"You are visionary, Joe," said Nelson. "You must remember that the Yankees will make a big resistance."

"Well, I'm allowing for that," declared the orderly sergeant.

For some time the fugitives remained where they were in the cover of the underbrush.

Then, finally Nelson suggested that they proceed. This proposal met with approval.

Cautiously though they proceeded. No chances were taken.

And so it happened that after a couple of hours of hard climbing through the woods they came to the open country.

Here they paused. They did not yet venture to leave the woods.

And there was a reason for their decision. Far across the fields they caught sight of the gleam of bayonets and the blue uniforms of a Union force.

"By Jingo," muttered Joe Spotswood, "it will never do to go over there, boys. I think we had better stay right here."

"You are right on that score, Joe," said Nelson, the scout.

So they found a comfortable place in the bushes and settled down to wait. An hour passed.

The Union detachment had passed from sight, but on a distant hillside they saw a signal corps.

They knew that these fellows, with their powerful glasses, would be sure to locate them if they appeared in the open.

So they decided very wisely to remain right where they were. The day was rapidly drawing to a close.

Night would soon be at hand and then they could go on safely.

As after events proved, this was a very wise decision. But the boys were confronted by one very distressing fact.

This was that no food had passed their lips for many hours. It is hardly necessary to say that they were hungry.

"By Jingo," cried Joe Spotswood, "how I would like one of mother's good chicken pies just now."

"Gee! don't speak of it," exclaimed Randolph. "It makes my mouth water. What do you say, Will?"

"I wouldn't refuse hard tack if I had it," said the boy

captain. "But it looks like we'd be hungry for some while yet, comrades."

"Well, it's our own fault if we are," said the scout.

"How is that?"

"Out yonder is a farm house. I can see the barn and the poultry yard from here. If you fellows will stay here until I return I'll get you something to eat."

"What?" exclaimed Will. "That is not really safe. The Yankee troops are just beyond that house."

"That's all right. I can play a game to fool them."

"Do you think so?"

"Haven't I been doing it all through the war? What sort of a scout do you think I am? I have been in the Union lines more than in our own."

"That's right," cried Joe. "Nelson has no uniform. They'll think he is one of the country people hereabouts. Go on, Jack. I'll bet you'll win."

"I will certainly try," said Nelson determinedly. "If I don't come back you'll know the game has failed."

The scout, with this, boldly left the woods and made his way to the nearest line of rail fence. He climbed through it and at a slouching gait crossed the open field.

He soon disappeared in a sunken road. The boys in hiding all drew a deep breath.

"I wish him luck," said Fred Randolph, "but it looks to me like a risky undertaking."

"If Nelson can't get food for us nobody can," declared Joe decidedly. "He can fool the Yankees better than any man I ever knew."

"He is a valuable man for the Confederacy," admitted Will. "I hope nothing will happen to him."

For a long time they waited. But they saw no more of Nelson.

Whether he had succeeded in reaching the farm house or not they never knew. He did not return.

Darkness settled down. The position of the three young Confederates was in a certain sense not of the worst.

But they were exceedingly hungry and would have given much for even a piece of hard tack.

But, with darkness, confidence came to them.

"Queer what is keeping Nelson," said Fred Randolph with anxiety.

"I don't think it queer," said Will. "It seems very simple to me."

"Well, what is your theory?"

"I think he is a prisoner."

"You think the Yankees got him?"

"I do."

"Well," said Joe Spotswood, with a queer ring in his voice, "it's up to us, then, to get him out of the scrape. We must do something at once. Jack Nelson must be rescued. They'll find out that he is a spy and they'll hang him."

"Don't you worry," said Fred Randolph confidently. "Nelson will take care of himself."

"In any event," declared Will, "I believe we will do better to get out of this. We will visit that farm house and see if we can't get something to eat."

"Bravo!" cried Joe Spotswood. "I'm with you, captain."

Will Prentiss, however, had no idea of walking into a trap. He believed that the occupants of the farmhouse, like most of the Maryland people, were friendly to the Confederates.

In this case it would not be at all difficult to secure hospitable treatment, and even protection from the Union foe.

But Will knew that there had been many Union detachments about the place. Doubtless one of these had picked up Nelson and made a prisoner of him.

So, when the three young Confederates left the cover of the trees and crept out into the open field, they proceeded cautiously.

Will led the way.

They advanced a few yards at a time and listened. The darkness was intense. They could see the light at the farmhouse window.

This beckoned them on alluringly. It seemed to promise plenty of good cheer.

So they made it their objective point. In a short while they came to the sunken road where they had last seen Nelson.

The scout had disappeared in this road. That he had followed it there was no doubt.

Will Prentiss did not pursue this course. It was his theory that the road might be held by a picket or guard. It would be better to go direct to the farmhouse.

The boys crossed the sunken road and kept on.

Suddenly a startling thing happened. Will, who was in advance, observed in the gloom an object at his right, which he thought was a stump.

The young captain would have given it little heed, but Joe Spotswood advanced toward it. The orderly sergeant was within a few feet of it when it arose and a hoarse voice said:

"What are ye doin' here?"

To say that the trio of young Confederates were amazed would be a mild statement. For a moment not one was able to speak. Will Prentiss whipped out his sword. But a juring laugh followed:

"Don't ye mind, friends. I know ye're not Yanks, an' I ain't one myself. Ye've got nuthin' to fear."

"Who are you?" demanded Will.

"I'm only Jed Blink, overseer of the 'ere farm," was the reply.

"Ah!" exclaimed the young captain, lowering his voice. "You are a loyal Southerner. You won't betray us?"

"I should say not," replied Blink in a confidential tone. "But what did ye come from?"

"We gave a Yankee guard the slip back here a few miles. We're just about starved and thought we might find friends at the farmhouse."

Jed Blink chuckled.

"Oh, ye thought ye'd find friends at the house, eh?"

"Well, I reckon ye kin, although tain't a drestful long time since I saw 'em. They was a thick, about hy: they flies on a dead man."

CHAPTER IX.

THE FARMER'S TREACHERY.

The fugitives were indeed much relieved by this discovery that Jed Blink was a loyal Southerner and a friend.

Joe Spotswood, unable to control himself longer, pushed forward and asked:

"I say, friend, did you see anything of a man of about thirty, thick set and dressed in ordinary store clothes, around here a few hours ago?"

Jed Blink peered at the orderly sergeant in the gloom.

"Was he a Yank?"

"No. He's a Virginian."

"Did he hev a little scar over his right eye an' one finger missin'?"

"Yes, yes."

"Wall," said Blink, expectorating tobacco juice, "I reckon ther Yanks got him."

"Gee!" gasped the orderly sergeant. "It's just as I told you boys. Poor Nelson got caught up by the Yanks."

"I was sorry fer him, but I couldn't help him," said Blink. "I reckon they put him out of the way as a spy."

An exclamation of horror went up.

"What's that?" exclaimed Will in dismay. "Did they hang him?"

"I heerd 'em say that was the game. Leastwise they took him over to ther woods thar along with a rope."

"That was wicked," groaned Spotswood. "Poor Nelson! I'll avenge him if it takes me a life time."

"In course I couldn't do nuthin' to help him," declared Blink. "They'd hev hung me, too."

"That's all right, Blink," said Will. "You cannot be blamed. But tell me, my good man, are there any Yanks about here now?"

"Not that I knows of," replied Blink. "As near as I kin tell, they've all gone to ther southward. Thar ain't none on this farm jest now anyway."

"Good!" cried Fred Randolph. "You may be sure that is good news for us. Now, Blink, whose farm is this?"

"It belongs to Cal Sutherland, but he ain't round hyar now. I'm ther only one about ther premises."

"Is that so? What is the chance for us to get something to eat? We will pay well for some food."

"I'm yer checker," said Jed unctuously. "You kin bet that I'll fix ye up. Old Huldah is cookin' fer me over to ther house, an' you bet she's a good one."

"Well, just introduce us to Huldah and we'll make it advantageous to her to get us up a meal," cried Joe.

"Come along, boys. I reckon we Marylanders hev some idea of hospitality."

It is hardly necessary to say that the three young Confederates complied with Blink's request at once.

They followed the overseer across the field and were soon in the farm yard. They walked boldly up to the kitchen door, and Blink opened it.

At a kitchen stove stood a fat colored woman. She looked up and rolled her eyes at sight of the boys.

"Marry de Lord! What you owe me with dem Rogers, Mar-

"If Massa Linkum's men eber sees dem it will be de end of dem fo' suah."

"Don't you fret, Aunt Huldah," said Jed quietly. "The Yanks have gone, an' it's safe enough round yere now. But these gentlemen are hungry an' you kin git 'em somethin' to eat."

The negro woman placed her arms akimbo and stared at the boys.

"Dunno nuffin' 'bout 'em," she said in a lofty manner. "Ain't got no food in de house fit ter eat."

"Ah, that's all right, Aunt Huldah," cried Will Prentiss, "hungry men are not particular. Get us up something as soon as you can. See here!"

Will flashed a handful of silver coins in her face. It acted like magic.

"Fo' de lan's sakes, gemmen, ole Huldah nebber turn nobody away hungry yit. Yo' see if I don' git ye sufin' dat make yo' stomach feel better. Yah, yo' jes' leave dat to old Huldah."

And the old negress was as good as her word. She soon had the table spread with an assortment of dainties such as the boys had not seen the like of since leaving Richmond.

It is hardly necessary to say that they did ample justice to the meal. They fairly gorged themselves.

Will paid the negress liberally. In the meantime Jed Blink had gone out.

When they had finished the boy captain looked around for Blink. It was his purpose to give him something for his trouble. But the overseer was not present.

However, as it was certain that he would soon return, the boy captain leaned back in his chair and asked:

"Your master has left the farm, has he, Aunt Huldah?"

"He done git out when he fus' heah ob de Yankees," replied the old negress. "He done gone Babineer. Yo' bet he won't come back yere till de Yankees go away."

"Then they have been plenty about here."

The old negress rolled her eyes and looked about in a mysterious way.

"Dere am plenty ob dem let' yit," she said.

Will was interested.

"Ah," he said casually. "Do you think there are any very near here?"

"Jed ober onder beyont de spring house dere am a hull rigiment ob dem," declared the black woman. "I done reckon Jed Blink knows wha' he is doin' to bring yo' heah. But if I was to hab mah way I'd say to yo' not to stay yere one leetle moment."

Will looked at his companions. This was certainly a startling announcement. But just then the door opened.

Blink came in.

The overseer glanced at the boys and then at the black woman. He seemed to guess what had been said, for he quickly declared:

"Ther ain't no Yankee herabouts. I've been all over ther farm. It's all clear."

"That is reassuring," said Will. "Then you think we are safe here for the present?"

"I reckon you will be till mornin'. If any of ther Yanks show up, then I'll find a safe place to hide ye."

"You're all right, Blink," said Joe Spotswood. "That gives me a chance to get in some good sleep. And you bet I need it, too."

The orderly sergeant stretched himself out on his blanket laid on the floor. Blink nodded assent and the other boys followed his example.

Aunt Huldah now retired with the lamp. Blink disappeared, and the three fugitives were left to their slumber.

And they slept soundly.

The rest was indeed welcome and needed. Not until the sun's rays shone in at the kitchen window did they arouse.

Then Aunt Huldah appeared and cooked them up a breakfast.

"Don't keer nuffin' 'bout dem Yankees laik mos' black folks do," she declared. "Ise been a slave fo' so long dat I wouldn't know what to do wif mah liberty."

"You have always had a good home, Aunt Huldah," said Will.

"'Deed I has, an' I don' want to lose it," declared the black woman. Then she lowered her voice and there was a queer note in it as she said:

"Neber did like dat Jed Blink. He am' neber to be trusted. Don' yo' believe too many fings he says."

Will and his companions were astounded. They had felt implicit confidence in the overseer.

Will looked sharply at the old woman to make sure that it was not personal prejudice alone that swayed her. But just then the door opened.

Blink came in.

His face was a study. It was drawn and pale. His manner was excited:

"Ther Yanks are close by, gents," he declared. "Yed better hide ter onct."

"What!" exclaimed Will, bounding to his feet. "Where shall we go? Are they close at hand?"

"I reckon they are," began Blink.

"See here," cried Will sternly, clutching the fellow's arm. "Are you playin' u' false? The truth now, or I'll have your hide."

Blink gasped and rolled his eyes in terror. He tried to break away.

"I'm on ther square," he cried. "I tell ye th' truth. I'm on ther square."

Will relaxed his grip.

"All right," he said. "Can we safely get away from here?"

"No, no," cried the frightened overseer. "They'll get ye. Hide somewhars. Not in ther house. To ther barn!"

Blink's terror was so genuine and his apprehension so sincere that Will was deceived. Quickly the boys followed the overseer to the barn.

Blink stepped back. The great door of the barn was wide open. There were scaffolds of hay on either side.

The three Grays sprang into the barn. But even as they did so a great shout went up.

Turning, they saw Union soldiers on the guard on

officer. The Grays were

ered.

Blink stood back with a light of triumph in his eyes. It was plain that he was responsible.

The treachery of the farmer was apparent. He stood a grinning and triumphant witness, while the young Union officer said:

"Boys, it's all up. You might as well surrender."

Will Prentiss tried to think of a plan to escape.

But it was hopeless.

The foe surrounded the barn. To fight was out of the question against such odds. Again their hard luck had overtaken them.

But, hot with anger, Will now turned upon the treacherous Blink.

"You infernal scoundrel!" he cried. "I have a mind to kill you!"

Blink dodged back behind the bayonets of the Union infantrymen. Then the young Union officer said:

"I will admit we would never have known you were here but for this fellow. You are a captain?"

"I am," replied Will. "My name is Prentiss. My company was the Virginia Grays, of Jackson's Division."

"And these—your companions——"

"Lieutenant Randolph and Sergeant Spotswood."

"Pardon me. May I ask how you happen to be here at this time?"

"Certainly. Our company fell into the hands of your troops under Colonel Lane. At this moment my company is on its way to Washington as prisoners. We made our escape."

A shadow crossed the young officer's face.

"Ah, you broke your parole?"

"No, sir. We were not under parole," replied Will. "We are prisoners pure and simple. We escaped from our captors."

"I will not question your veracity. But you will pardon me if I cause you to be searched for important papers."

"I have no papers," said Will. "I have only my rifle and my sword."

"Very well. I will only ask a further question. Are you a Confederate?"

"Certainly," replied Will. "I am a Confederate."

Will saw at once that the young officer was a youth of high education, and he felt a liking for him.

CHAPTER X.

THE FIGHT AT THE BRIDGE.

The Confederate soldiers were searched and no papers were found on them. This seemed to please the young Union officer, who said:

"Gentlemen, I am pleased to say that I shall not feel compelled to treat you as spies or suspicious objects. I consider you prisoners of war."

"I will be glad to return to the country," said Will, "although," with a sigh, "I would like to see you again as soon as possible."

"I will be glad to see you," said the young officer, "but I must go now. I have a great deal to do."

"Wait," gritted Joe Spotswood, "I'll even it up with that scoundrel yet. He was the most treacherous snake I ever knew."

It is certain that the young officer's words were the last calamity. It seemed to them as if fate was assailing them against them.

Lieutenant Bartley, for that was the Union officer's name, marched them down the highway for two miles to a bridge across a creek.

Here was a full Union regiment encamped, doubtless for the purpose of holding the bridge against the Confederate advance.

The boys were placed under guard in the shadow of a huge oak and there left to their own devices.

"Well," growled Spotswood, "this is the meanest scrape we ever got into. I don't see any chance to get out of it, either."

"Nor I," said Fred despondently. "Our fighting days are over."

"Pshaw," said Will testily, "that is a good way to look at it. When you get into trouble give right up."

"Well," said Fred, "can you see any chance for us?"

"Yes, a hundred chances."

"What are they?"

"You will see them in time. Didn't we escape before?"

"Things were in our favor."

"Undoubtedly. But that may happen again. Then you will wonder why you got discouraged. If we had reached the Union prison camp then we might have been rescued or to see just as good a chance to escape as before."

"You are a born optimist, Will Prentiss."

"Better that than a hypochondriac."

"That's right," agreed Spotswood. "We will pluck up grit and yet pull out. Hello! What the dickens——"

The orderly sergeant paused with a gasp. His eyes bulged, and for a moment he trembled with intense excitement.

His gaze was fixed on a thicket near the bank of the creek. It was twenty-five yards away and right inside the camp lines.

Yet, in that thicket Spotswood had beheld a startling object.

It was a human face.

It was framed for a moment in the screen of green leaves. Then it vanished. A moment later a hand appeared in the same spot.

And this hand began to work convulsively. Spotswood knew what it meant. The hand was conveying to him a very intelligible message in the deaf and dumb alphabet.

The sergeant had recognized the face in the thicket as that of Nelson, the scout. It can be readily understood how Spotswood felt.

But when the scout came back with the deaf and dumb language, Joe learned the truth.

It was a trick which both the sergeant and the scout knew, and on the march they had often rehearsed the sign language, so that now the sergeant was able to communicate with the scout.

And he learned some startling facts.

"I was unable to return," the scout said in the sign language. "I was captured by a guard of three Yankees. They marched me two miles into the woods, when I eluded them and got away. Since then I have been trying to find my way back. I saw you from the opposite bank of the creek. I swam across under the bridge, and here I am."

"Well, you bet we are glad to see you," replied Joe. "We were told that you had been hung as a spy."

"That, you see, was false."

"Yes."

"But how were you captured?" asked the scout.

"By the treachery of the overseer of the farm. He fed us and kept us over night, only to betray us into the hands of the foe the next day."

"The fool!"

"So we regard him."

"If I am not discovered I shall make an effort to rescue you. If we can get away from here safely I think we can plan to cut off the prisoner's guard on its march and rescue the Grays."

"That would be great. I'll tell Captain Prentiss what you say."

With this Joe told Will and Fred all. The two young men were surprised, as well as delighted, to know that the Grays were so near them.

"What a joy to know that!" whispered Will. "What a joy to know that!"

The spirits of the prisoners arose with a bound. Also, when Nelson presently resumed the sign language, they learned a startling fact.

Jackson had fought another engagement and recovered the ground he had lost. He was marching rapidly in this direction. It would be an easy matter to join him once they got out of the present scrape.

The two guards who paced monotonously up and down before the prisoners gave little heed to what they were doing.

So the deaf and dumb conversation was not noted by them. Joe held a long consultation with the scout.

Finally Nelson said:

"I am compelled to go now. If you are kept here over night you may look for an attempt on my part to liberate you."

Then the scout disappeared. He slipped back into the creek and dropped down under cover of the bank until he was again beyond the line of the encampment.

With suspense the three prisoners now waited for the scout to pass. But the guard was not to be so easily deceived.

The bridge was built of heavy

logs rough hewn and set on abutments and a pier of other logs.

At the end of the bridge was a guard of a dozen Union soldiers. Beyond the bridge there were doubtless videttes to tell of the approach of an enemy.

The three prisoners still reclined on the turf under the oak tree and watched the sun draw near the meridian. Its quick transit to the western horizon was a matter of great importance to them.

But, while thus waiting for the day to pass they were not without misgivings. Of these one was that they might be placed in the hands of a detail and sent on the march to Washington.

They knew that once they were within the prison camp all hope of escape was lost and there was an ugly rumor that President Lincoln had refused to make further exchanges.

So it was an anxious time for the boys.

But while thus in suspense suddenly a strange thing happened. It was the first of a series of rapidly following incidents.

The clatter of hoofs were heard beyond the bridge.

Several mounted men in blue had appeared. They were videttes.

They seemed excited, and the colonel of the regiment hastily crossed the bridge. Then in the distance the report of a musket was heard.

In an instant the truth dawned upon the prisoners.

"Will," exclaimed Fred Randolph, "did you hear that?"

"Yes."

"Something is up. I tell you our boys are coming."

The three young Confederates looked at each other excitedly. There was no doubt in their minds that this was true.

In fact, the actions of the Union guard now proved it.

The colonel of the regiment ran back across the bridge and gave quick orders. Kegs of gunpowder were rolled under the abutment of the bridge. Then the guard on the other side were recalled.

The pickets came running in. Already a rattling fire of musketry was swelling through the woods.

The foe was coming. Nearer every moment they drawing to the bridge. The Union colonel had his horse drawn back from the bridge in the cover of the woods.

The prisoners had evidently been forgotten in the excitement. The two guards who paced up and down before them, though their attention was claimed by the noise at the bridge, as could be plainly seen.

It was hardly necessary to say that Will Prentiss and his companions were interested in the affair.

Bullets began to whistle through the trees. The next moment a rousing cheer was heard and gray uniforms appeared on the other bank.

It was an inspiring sight to the prisoners. They could not resist the impulse to swing their arms and cheer.

And now the battle opened.

Volley after volley from the Union regiment. But the Confederates answered bravely.

Fierce indeed grew the conflict.

Then the prisoners saw a young Confederate colonel spring in front of his men, with sword waving. Forward went the gray line.

They reached the bridge and surged upon it. They were coming across to attack the foe.

But Will Prentiss gasped in horror. He had seen the death trap prepared.

He sprang up, and waving his hands wildly, shouted:

"Back, back! For your lives, back! You will be blown into eternity!"

One of the guards placed his bayonet at Will's breast and forced him back. But in that moment a great livid flash rose upon the air.

It traversed the line of road like a fiery serpent, hissing and flaming. It was the deadly path of powder laid to the powder kegs.

Only one brief instant did that deadly flash fill the air.

Then there was a thunderous roar and an upheaval. A column of water and timbers rose high in the air.

Human bodies were hurled into the black waters of the creek. For one instant Will Prentiss saw the heroic figure and handsome face of the young Confederate colonel. Then he was seen no more.

Yells and cheers of victory filled the air on the Union side. But Will Prentiss covered his face with his hands to blot out the awful scene.

CHAPTER XI.

LUCK CHANGES.

By blowing up the bridge the Confederate attack was for the moment repulsed. The Union soldiers were in an elated frame of mind.

The Confederate force greatly outnumbered them. But the advantage was now certainly with the Union force.

"Hang it! That was too bad!" said Joe Spotswood. "That young colonel ought to have known that bridge was mined."

"Never mind," said Fred Randolph. "You'll see that the battle is not over yet by any means."

Indeed this was the truth.

Some distance below, where the water was more shallow, the attacking force had begun to ford the creek. The fire was hotter than ever.

The Union colonel now ordered the fire to be concentrated upon the spot where the crossing was being made. But just at that moment an unlooked for thing occurred.

Into view on the other side galloped a field battery. With speed and precision the artillerymen unlimbered the gun and sent a shell crashing into the Union line.

"That settles it," cried Joe Spotswood with exultation. "They'll have to run now. They never can stand the shells."

"That is right," cried Fred. "See, they are falling back now."

It became apparent that the Union line of defense was broken. In all this excitement of conflict the prisoners had quite forgotten.

But now the two guards in whose charge they were lowered their bayonets and cried:

"Fall in! Retreat!"

For a moment a daring resolve half impelled the boys to resist and make a mad break for their freedom. But they saw that this was not an easy matter.

They were unarmed, while the Union guard had muskets heavily loaded and bayonets.

Reluctantly the three young Confederates proceeded to obey. But they had not fallen back a dozen yards when a startling thing happened.

From behind there darted from the bushes a man's figure. He hurled a heavy object in his hand at the nearest guard. It was a large rock, and striking him at the base of the skull sent him down in an insensible condition.

The other guard turned to look into the muzzle of a pistol.

"Drop your musket and save your life! Drop it and run or I'll kill you!"

The guard half placed a finger on the lock of his gun. But he never lifted the piece.

He looked into a white determined face and a pair of flashing eyes that held the glare of death in them.

He instantly dropped his musket. Then he turned and ran.

"All right, boys," cried Jack Nelson, the scout. "I pulled you out of it this time all right."

"Jack," cried Will Prentiss as he rushed forward and fairly embraced the scout, "you have saved us."

"Well, that is what I set out to do," said the scout. "But I had luck on my side. General Willet, with a whole brigade, came up at just the right time."

"Hooray," cried Joe Spotswood. "Hooray for the Confederacy!"

"Luck is yet with us," cried Nelson. "I learn that the Union guard in charge of the Grays had been headed off at Little Creek by Cantrell's Cavalry. They can't go further until reinforced. General Willet will give us a couple of companies to go down there and rescue them."

This was a stunning revelation. For a moment Will and his comrades were hardly able to realize it.

"The deuce!" cried Fred. "All is not lost yet. If we can rescue the Grays we may yet recruit them and keep up the organization to the end of the war."

"I hope so," said Will devoutly, "but let us get into the fight here and do what we can for our comrades."

"There is little need of it," said Nelson. "They are all on the run. General Willet will not pursue them."

"Then let us see General Willet at once."

"That is a good idea."

So the boys at once set out for the fordway, where Willet's men had crossed. The general and his staff had just ridden their horses across.

The scout advanced and saluted. In a few moments Will was gripping hands with General Willet.

"Well, Prentiss, I am glad we pulled you out of trouble," said the Confederate general. "They tell me you have been having hard luck."

"The very worst of luck," declared Will. "But we anticipate a change now."

"I hope so. Nelson tells me that your company is under guard and being marched by the Little Creek road to the Union prison camps."

"That is true."

"I know that Cantrell's Cavalry holds the ford down there and has a Union force at bay. I don't know the particulars, but if you want two companies of men to go down there and pull your comrades out you are welcome to them."

"I can't thank you enough, general."

"Oh, that is all right. We must beat the Yankees, and the only way to do it is to help each other."

"That is right, General Willet. Too few commanders look at it in that light."

"Yes, I know. They want the honor of whipping the North all to themselves. Well, they'll never get it."

Will Prentiss was quickly given orders by General Willet for two companies. They were detached and the boy captain took command of them.

It was a joyful moment for Joe and Fred, and Nelson as well. Everything now seemed once more propitious.

The day was yet young. Leaving General Willet at the bridge, rapidly the little force of two hundred men set out for the Little Creek road.

It was a march of six miles, but the scout Nelson knew every foot of the way. He led them a rapid pace.

Two hours later they came to a ravine through which flowed a stream. Then they heard the desultory fire of musketry.

"There they are!" cried Nelson. "Forward, boys! We'll take them in the rear."

In a few moments a thrilling scene was revealed.

The Union guard in charge of the Confederate prisoners, among whom were the Virginia Grays, had been brought to bay at the creek by Cantrell's Cavalry.

A sharp fight had followed. As a result of this the Union guard had sent back for reinforcements. They had intrenched themselves and were thus able to hold Cantrell at bay.

But the reinforcements for which they sent did not arrive as quickly as they had hoped for. When the little party under Will Prentiss' command came into view there was a panic.

Quickly Will deployed his men for a rear attack. Cantrell's men on the other side of the creek saw them and sent up wild cheers.

The plucky Union guard, however, had no thought of surrender. They returned the fire, and soon a desperate fight was in progress.

It was a thrilling moment for the Confederate prisoners. They realized, of course, that the move was being made to rescue them.

But Cantrell now crossed the creek and made a savage attack. This, with the rear attack, speedily threw the Union defenders into confusion.

The sequel was brief.

A white flag was displayed in token of surrender. Firing ceased and the fight was over.

Will Prentiss quickly marched his men forward and the Union prisoners laid down their arms. Cantrell came up on the other side and joined Will.

"Who sent ye down here?" asked the cavalry leader in surprise. "We wasn't expectin' to see ye."

"No?" said Will. "Well, I came down to rescue my company, the Virginia Grays."

"The deuce! Were they prisoner?"

"Yes."

The Grays were now free and they surrounded their young captain with wildest delight. There was but a handful of them, two-thirds of the company having laid down their lives for their cause.

But this little remnant of the brave little Reformed company were as full of enthusiasm and valor as ever.

They were ready to follow their young leader into any enterprise, no matter how desperate—to give up their lives at any moment on the field of battle.

But Will Prentiss experienced a thrill of ineffable sadness as he saw their depleted ranks and recalled the bravery of those who were gone.

Tears were in his eyes as he greeted each member of the company in turn.

"You're not going to give us up, Will?" they cried. "Keep us together. We will fight with you until the last man is gone."

Such touching devotion might well make the heart of any soldier proud. In that moment Will Prentiss felt the chord of comradeship which is known only to those who have fought side by side on the field of battle.

The Grays were armed with the muskets captured from the Union guard. They were ready as ever for action.

To Cantrell Will turned over the spoils of the camp and the Union prisoners. The guard which General Willet had given him he now sent back.

So that a little later the Grays, with their young captain at their head, were marching away down the Little Creek road to find Stonewall Jackson and report to him.

Nelson, the scout, yet remained with Will. The scout asked:

"Will you attempt to recruit your company, Captain Prentiss?"

"I shall see and confer with General Jackson," replied Will. "I shall depend on his judgment."

"It would seem too bad to disband thus early in the war."

"Only absolute necessity would induce us to do that," said Will.

The Grays marched on until nightfall. They then came to an abandoned house and decided to remain there for the night.

They bivouacked outside the building. The place had been looted by guerillas and was windowless and badly shattered.

But it afforded shelter, so Will took up his quarters in it. Darkness settled down rapidly.

Will had little idea as to what perils the night ahead might hold. For aught he knew Union forces might be near.

He had employed every known means to assure himself that this was not the case. It was only possible then for him to take chances.

A heavy guard was posted, though, as a matter of precaution. Then the tired soldier boys rolled themselves up in their blankets to sleep.

It was after midnight that Will Prentiss was roused from slumber by a hand laid on his brow.

He sprang up instantly. A dark figure stood before him. For a moment he was alarmed.

CHAPTER XII.

A DARING PROJECT.

But the next moment a familiar voice dispelled the captain's fears.

"Captain Prentiss, pardon me for so suddenly waking you, but I have a matter of deep importance to present."

"Nelson!" exclaimed Will. "You gave me a bad scare. What is up?"

"That is a question I would like to have answered," said the scout. "Come with me and I'll show you."

"Very well."

The scout led the way out of the house. In the outer air he drew a deep breath and whispered:

"I don't see what it means! We can't make a turn that we don't find the foe on all sides of us."

"What do you mean now?" asked Will.

"Come with me!"

Will followed the scout through the sleeping line of men. In a short while they reached the picket guard.

They passed the guard and proceeded a few hundred yards to a little nearby knoll. From this knoll quite an extended view of the country below could be had.

"Do you see that glow of light hanging over the trees about half a mile down yonder there?" asked Nelson.

Will saw a luminous light over the woods. He regarded it curiously.

"Well?" he asked.

"Do you know what it means?"

"There is a campfire down there among the trees."

"Right, but it is not one campfire. It is a dozen of them."

"Have you been down there?"

"No."

"Do you know who is encamped there?"

"No, but I am sure it is a foe."

"Might it not be a detachment of Jackson's?"

"I don't believe it. We have tried so hard to get trace of Jackson that I am sceptical on the point."

"Well," said Will reflectively, "I believe it will pay us to investigate that encampment."

"So do I."

The young captain hesitated a moment. He did not like the idea of leaving his comrades just then.

On the other hand, he knew that it would not be advisable to take them with him. The best and safest way was to go with the scout.

"Nelson," he said, "you and I will go down there and investigate."

"It is a good plan."

"Lead the way."

The scout plunged down the side of the knoll. In a few moments he was deep in the woods.

The boy captain followed him.

They kept on rapidly. It seemed to Will that they must soon come to the camp fires when a peremptory hail rang out:

"Halt! Who goes thar?"

Will and the scout dodged back into the gloom. Then they tried a trick which was old to the skilled scout and

"Halt or I'll fire!" yelled the picket.

But they did not do so. The scout made a quick and silent detour to the left, coming back in the shadows to a point very near the picket.

The latter had fired his gun. The guard and its sergeant came clattering down. The usual excited queries followed.

Then the guard started out into the darkness beyond the picket line to investigate. This put the two scouts inside the line.

While the picket was eagerly pointing out to the guard where he had seen the suspicious strangers they had slipped past him in the gloom and were inside the line.

It was a clever ruse usually practiced by one man to let another slip through. But in this case both spies got through.

Once inside the picket line it was necessary to move with the greatest of caution.

The glow of the campfires could be plainly seen. Then a few moments later the boys made a startling discovery.

They recognized the men lounging about the campfires.

They were not Union soldiers, but guerillas. They had stumbled upon the camp of Manuel Laton, the guerilla.

"Whew!" exclaimed Nelson. "This is a surprise. Well, I never dreamed of finding Laton about here."

"Nor I," agreed the young captain. "It is quite a surprise. How does he dare to show himself so near our post?"

"I believe Laton would dare anything. Well, now that we are in his camp we ought to do him some damage before we leave."

"I wish we could make a prisoner of him. I have orders to hang him."

"By Jingo! Wouldn't that be great to hang him in his own camp?"

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know myself," said the scout, "but suppose he was in that white tent over there and we were able to creep in and surprise him and gag him. We might hang him in his own tent."

Will shook his head.

"Ugh!" he said, "that is too much like the work of a secret assassin."

"But that would be carrying out your orders literally."

"Very true. But I don't like the method. I'd rather capture him and take him to our camp and hang him there."

"May we ever do that?"

"I don't believe it possible."

"Wait and see. You have nerve. Follow me and be ready to assist me."

Before Will could protest the scout had glided away around the camp circle toward the rear of the tent. That this tent was the guerilla chief's quarters the scout seemed to feel sure.

Will followed him, now much interested. The spirit of the daring piece of work seized upon him.

He was ready for any desperate work.

But as the two invaders of the guerillas' camp were sidling along in the gloom a couple of dark figures loomed up in the gloom before them.

There was no time to get out of the way. One of them collided with Nelson.

"Confound ye fer an ass!" growled the guerilla. "What are ye prowlin' out hyer for?"

"For jest as good a reason as you kin give!" growled the scout in return. His vernacular was perfect.

"Wall, look whar ye're goin' next time. Ye durned nigh broke my collar bone, Jim Ewelt. I know ye an' I'll talk with ye later."

"Aw, go soak yer head," retorted the scout, moving away.

The two guerillas suspecting nothing, passed on now. It was a clever ruse on the scout's part.

But they were safe now and crept along rapidly. A moment more and they were in the shadows back of the tent.

Nelson first made sure that there was no one near.

Then he cautiously crept up to the canvas wall of the tent. He sought a crevice, but found none.

However, he speedily remedied this difficulty. A touch with the keen blade of his hunting knife punctured the canvas.

He peered through this little eyehole and gave a start.

At a camp table busily engaged in writing was the guerilla chief. He was the one occupant of the tent.

There was no guard before the tent. There was no guerilla within twenty-five yards of the tent.

But at that distance half a dozen of the crew sat about a campfire. The rear of the tent was in deep shadow, but the front was not.

The scout stepped back and motioned Will to peer in. The boy captain did so. He was thrilled.

"It's Manuel Laton himself!" he whispered.

"Yes."

For a moment there was silence. Both seemed to be thinking.

Then the scout whispered:

"We can do it."

"What?"

"Get him. Take him with us."

"What is your game?" Will whispered.

"A simple one," said the scout. "I will slip in at the front entrance. A pistol at his head will hold him. You take this knife, and when you see I have him slit a hole in the rear of the tent. Then while I cover him you will gag him. The rest will be easy."

The daring of this enterprise for a moment appalled Will. But for all that it fascinated him.

"Go ahead, Nelson," he said. "I'll do my part."

"All right."

The scout slipped away. He paused one moment at the corner of the tent in the shadow.

He could see the guerillas playing cards down in the light of the campfire. They could see the front of their chief's tent easily enough by looking up.

But it was hardly likely that they ever gave it more than a casual glance. The scout remembered that he was not in Confederate uniform and therefore not a mark.

His entrance into the tent if seen would doubtless excite no interest, much less suspicion. Yet he hesitated.

At a moment when all the men at the fire seemed engaged in the game he slipped into the tent entrance. He heard no outcry. It was certain that all was well.

He stood a moment looking into the tent. Laton did not look up from his table.

He was engrossed in his writing. It was certain that he did not know of the scout's presence.

Silently and like a shadow, the scout moved forward. Something impelled the guerilla chief to look up.

He gave a start and his lips moved to give an outcry.

But a piercing gaze held him and a deadly voice jarred upon his brain.

"Not a whimper or a groan, or I'll scatter your brains! I am desperate and would as soon kill you as eat."

The guerilla chief's face grew ashen. He looked into the deadly tulle. A crafty gleam emanated from his eyes.

He was certainly trying to evolve some plan for the circumventing of his captor. Of some way to get the alarm to his men outside.

But there was none.

Death held him terror-struck. He knew that his captor would fire. There was no hope. He was caught.

"I cave!" he said. "What are yer terms?"

"That you make no outcry on pain of your life."

"That ain't what I mean. I'll settle with ye hand one! How much money do ye want?"

"Money!" gritted the scout. "Do you measure me as you measure yourself?"

"Ye don't mean to say that money won't buy ye?"

"Not all the money in the world. Your day has come, Manuel Laton. You can't raid and burn the houses of any more helpless people. You are going to get justice now, and if you had a king's ransom it wouldn't save you."

CHAPTER XIII.

A RICHLY DESERVED FATE.

The guerilla read the truth in the scout's eyes. He gasped and beads of cold sweat appeared on his brow.

"Put up yer gun," he said. "I'll make it right with ye. What good will it do ye to take my life?"

"You shall see."

In the meantime Will had slit the canvas in the rear and now stepped into the tent.

"Gag him," said the scout. "Tie his hands behind his back!"

Will quickly obeyed. Gagged and bound, the guerilla chief was helpless. So far all had worked well.

But there was another difficulty to overcome. This was to get their prisoner beyond the picket line.

The guard would certainly be suspicious and give the alarm. It was certainly necessary to dispose of the picket.

However, the two daring captors were bound to meet this exigency. The scout closed and fastened the front flap of the tent.

This would give any visitor to infer that the guerilla chief had retired and did not wish to be disturbed.

Then the two captors led their prisoner into the gloom through the rent in the rear of the tent.

They were now in the dark shadows. There was, of course, always the risk of meeting one or more of the guerillas.

To guard against this as far as possible Will went ahead and reconnoitered. In this way they approached the picket.

It was then necessary to use strategy. It fell to Will Prentiss to evolve a plan.

So, leaving the scout and the prisoner in the gloom, he went forward boldly. He approached the picket guard, who said gruffly:

"Goin' outside the line? Better get ther countersign."

"Don't want none," retorted the young captain. "I've got suthin' here that'll pass me all right."

"What's that?"

"Come hyer an' I'll light a match so ye kin see."

Will held a slip of paper in his hand. The guard could see it in the gloom, but of course could not read it. Will struck a match and held it in the hollow of his hand.

"Jest look hyer an' read this," he said.

The picket leaned forward to scan the paper. The match flashed in his eyes. The next instant Will's fingers were about his throat.

The picket made a desperate effort to free that choking clutch. But in a few seconds he was limp and senseless. Will laid him on the ground.

He had not done him serious injury, and he knew that he would come to all right in a short while.

But he took the precaution to gag and bind him. Then he crept back to Nelson and whispered:

"All right! I've cleared the way!"

"Good!" whispered the scout. "We are certainly playing in luck."

And so indeed it would seem. In a few moments they were beyond the picket line. Hastily they made their return to their own camp.

In due time they reached it. The captured guerilla was led into the abandoned house and placed under guard.

It is hardly necessary to say that Will and the scout were exuberant. But the scout now said:

"I tell you, my boy, it won't do for us to linger here until daylight. We had better go on in the darkness. We can be a good many miles from here before daylight."

"I think you are right," said Will. "I will call Lieutenant Randolph and have the company called to arms."

Fred sprang up and when he learned the truth of the capture of Laton he was dumbfounded.

"Why didn't you call me," he cried. "I would have given much to have gone with you."

"Well, we didn't really formulate the plan till we got there," said Will. "But let us waste no time."

Quickly the Grays were called and fell in. The campfires were put out and the little band set out down the road once more.

Will Prentiss had been instructed by Jackson to hang Manuel Laton. But the boy captain had a peculiar aversion to doing this.

He was averse to taking life save in battle. But he was determined first to give the guerilla chief a trial.

On down the road they marched. The gag had now been removed from the mouth of the prisoner.

At a favorable moment the guerilla hailed Will, who walked over and remained beside him.

"What are ye goin' to do with me, Prentiss?" he asked.

"I mean to take you to General Jackson."

"He'll hang me."

"Well, I cannot help that."

"Yes, ye can."

"Why should I? Don't you think you deserve punishment for your crimes?"

"Do ye think I have done so many crimes?"

"You are steeped in crime—murder and everything that is horrible. I am treating you with mercy."

"Wall, I 'spose ye are," said the guerilla. "Ye're a Christian, ain't ye?"

"I am."

"You might be 'sprised ter know it, but I was deacon in a church afore ther war. Ye know ther Bible sayin' about 'Vengeance is mine?'"

"I have heard it."

"Don't ye think it better to let me settle my spiritual debts with ther Almighty?"

Will Prentiss gazed hard at the rascal. Such an argument as this was well worthy of his crafty spirit.

"So far as I am personally concerned," replied the boy captain, "I should be perfectly willing to let you settle it with your Maker. Indeed, I do not see that hanging you prevents that."

"Don't ther Saviour teach that it is better to forgive sinners than to punish 'em? That anyone repentant kin be saved?"

"Are you repentant?"

"Yas, I am! I'll take ther pledge to quit this life forever an' to live a Christian life hereafter if ye'll only give me a chance an' set me free!"

Had the fellow been less of a crafty scoundrel and had it not been possible for Will to see through his flimsy game the boy captain might have strongly considered his appeal.

But Will Prentiss was not to be deceived.

"Laton," he said sternly, "you know as well as I that you do not mean one word you say. If I should take your word you would break it the moment you got out of my sight. And that's the truth."

Seeing that he had failed, the guerilla began to indulge

(Continued on page 26.)

AN UNSOLICITED LETTER

From an Admirer of

"THE YOUNG ATHLETE'S WEEKLY"

NEW YORK CITY, N. Y., February 15, 1905.

FRANK TOUSEY, ESQ.,

Publisher of "Young Athlete's Weekly," N. Y.

DEAR SIR: Having had the extreme pleasure of reading all the books issued to date in the new "Young Athlete's Weekly," and noting the vast difference there is between this book and other so-called "literature" of the "weekly type," I cannot refrain from writing and thanking you, in the name of all "Young America," for putting such a sensible and yet very interesting book before us for our approval, and it is my frank opinion, confidently stated, that this book will, before it is six months old, outshine all other publications of this kind in circulation today, both in circulation and common sense, of which the latter is so freely distributed through the course of the story, and it will be deserving of all the praise that is sure to come from your subscribers when they come to realize the worth of this book, in various forms, if they have not already done so. As a book of information for those seeking vitality and strength, it can't be beat; in fact, it is a body-builder in itself, and that isn't saying any too much for it.

Heretofore, we representatives of the younger generation who have made a practice of reading these weekly magazines have been compelled through circumstances, mainly the lack of a good book like "The Young Athlete's Weekly," to read other juvenile stories, the like of which tend to discourage, rather than aid, a boy in his endeavor to seek good citizenship in later life, and it is with pleasure that I note we have now such a good substitute for these so-called "good literature for the American youth" novels, and it is the wish of one of the most ardent admirers of this new work that it shall come to the notice of boys all over the country, as I am positive it will meet with instant favor with all those who come in contact with it; it will only need a looking over of one book to convince any boy of the merits of this new publication.

The deeds as performed by the leading characters of "The Young Athlete's Weekly" are described in such a plausible way and with such exact explanation as to make it impossible for any one to charge the deeds done, or, rather, described as being done, as anything other than correct and feats which can be done, not only on paper, but by the person mentioned as doing same. This is the kind of a story any boy will take to like a duck takes to water, and it is up to you, Mr. Tousey, to make these stories so that they will be looked up to by all boys "as the best manufactured."

Your articles on Physical Training, by the author of this book, contained in your "Young Athlete's Weekly" every week, are worth five times the cost of the whole book, and although this book has not been long in circulation, I owe a good deal of my present good condition to the fact that I have obeyed to a "T" the instructions quoted in these "little chats" on training, and shall always look up to them as I would a professional instructor, for, being something of an athlete myself, I know everything stated in these articles to be true and very sensible, and any boy following the advice of "Physical Director" in these articles will certainly keep from being weak, at any rate. We cannot all be "strong-men," you know, but we can fix ourselves in such a manner as to make sickness from weakness impossible and to build our body up and bring our lungs to the point where it would be impossible for any one to suffer from consumption.

Some four or five years ago I was an interested reader of a weekly you were then publishing under the name of "Three Chums," and while referring to a copy of this weekly yesterday I find you were then devoting a page of this weekly to the exclusive use of your readers, entitling this department, or page, "Praise," to which department your readers wrote, giving their views on the weekly and its characters, these letters being published weekly; and I want to ask if this could not be done with "The Young Athlete's Weekly," as I am sure it would be an entire success in every way, and it would help we readers to get acquainted with each other all over the country. I am the president of the Seneca Club, of Brooklyn, composed of fifteen boys at present, and they are all admirers of your splendid "Young Athlete's Weekly," and all agree that such a move as I suggest would be welcomed by all your readers, as well as by us.

Hoping that the stories to come will be as interesting as those already published, and wishing a very successful career to this publication of yours, I am, Mr. Tousey,

Yours very respectfully,

Care of the Eccleston Lumber Co., 29 Broadway, City.

ALBERT FREDERICK AAMOLD.

If your newsdealer does not handle "THE YOUNG ATHLETE'S WEEKLY," send 5 cents to the Publisher, in money or postage stamps, and you will receive a copy by return mail. Address

Frank Tousey, Publisher, 24 Union Square, New York

(continued from page 24)

in fierce denunciations. He raved and swore like a fiend. Finally Will gave orders to replace the gag and he became quiet.

The Grays kept on for over two hours. Then they camped at a crossroads. It was impossible to tell just where they were.

It was decided to remain here until morning. But the Grays had barely rolled themselves up in their blankets when the clatter of hoofs smote upon the hard road.

The flash of a torch and the rattle of sabres indicated that a body of horsemen had arrived.

A loud, stern hail went up:

"Who is there? Speak or we fire!"

"Who are you?" cried Will Prentiss, as he gave the order for his men to hurriedly deploy in the woods.

"I am Colonel Lane of the United States Cavalry! Who are you?"

"Captain Will Prentiss of the Virginia Grays. I call on you to surrender!"

"Oh, is that you, Prentiss? Yield and I will give you all possible advantages. There is no chance for you or your company. I have a large force!"

"The Grays will never surrender again," replied Will. "We would rather die than do that."

"Listen to reason, Prentiss! You will only be wiped out."

"Let it be so, then! We will never surrender. Fall back or we will fire!"

"Forward, men!" shouted Colonel Lane.

The crack of muskets rose upon the night air. The advantage of the night battle was certainly with the Grays.

The cavalymen could not force their horses through the undergrowth and many of them fell before the fire of the Grays. The result was that the Grays successfully retired to a height of land nearby.

But in the melee the prisoner Laton disappeared. It was a matter of deep chagrin to Will when he learned it.

"That is too bad!" he said. "I thought we should bring him to justice. Now he will begin his career all over again."

However, it could not be helped. For over an hour the muskets flashed in the darkness.

The Grays easily held their assailants at bay.

Then the firing ceased. Will was not sure that this might not be a ruse of the foe.

So he kept on his guard until daylight came. Then the surprising discovery was made that the foe had departed.

Why they had not remained was always a mystery to Will Prentiss. Whether it was that the Union colonel admiring the pluck of the Grays had in sympathy refrained from further attempt to annihilate them or that some more pressing duty had called them away, was never known.

It was enough that they had gone.

What was more the region seemed clear of the foe.

With great care Will caused the vicinity to be thoroughly reconnoitred. While this was in progress Nelson appeared and said:

"Prentiss, come with me! I want to show you something!"

Will followed the scout wonderingly. They did not pause until they had reached the cross-roads.

Then the boy captain beheld a startling sight. Hanging to the limb of a tree by the neck was a corpse.

It was the guerilla, Manuel Laton.

Will Prentiss drew a deep breath.

"Laton—hanged!" he exclaimed.

"Yes!" said the scout. "And you were spared the task."

"I can assure you I am glad of it."

"No doubt!"

"But to whom am I indebted?"

"Read that inscription pinned to his breast."

Will read a notice pinned to the breast of the dead man. Thus it read:

"My dear Prentiss: If this reaches your eyes thank me for having done a good job for you. This fellow fell into our hands and as he is as infamous a malefactor as ever graced the earth I took advantage of the opportunity to rid the world of him. Accept hearty compliments.

"LANE, Colonel U. S. Cavalry."

Will drew a deep breath.

"He deserved his fate," he said. "I am glad though that I did not have to do the job."

Some while later the boy captain sent a couple of the Grays down to bury the dead guerilla.

Shortly after sunrise the Virginia Grays were once more on the march in quest of Jackson's columns.

CHAPTER XIV.

"THE WOMAN WITH THE TEA-KETTLE."

But Will Prentiss was yet to meet thrilling adventures before he should see the headquarters of Stonewall Jackson and make report to his general.

The Grays had proceeded but a short distance down the highway when they saw a distant column of smoke rising in the air.

"What do you make of that?" asked Fred Randolph as he came up.

"I don't know!" replied the boy captain. "It is not artillery smoke I feel sure. It looks to me like a burning building."

"It is nothing else!" declared Nelson. "No doubt some detachment of bushwhackers or guerillas are destroying a homestead."

"As it is in our path we will investigate," said Will.

So the Grays pushed forward at the double quick. The smoke seemed to be about a mile away and beyond a wooded ridge.

The road here took a sharp turn and then proceeded up a steep ascent over the ridge.

A short while later, panting with their efforts, the Grays surmounted the ridge. They gazed down upon a level tract of country below and a glance took in the scene. The scout had been right in his assumption that the smoke came from a burning building.

A little hamlet was at the foot of the ridge. There was a church, a store and maybe a score of dwellings.

It was a typical Maryland town with shaded streets and spacious yards. A great throng of people were seen in the street.

Will saw that the street was barricaded and that the people seemed to be armed and engaged in a fight with a lawless gang of guerillas.

"Great Cæsar!" exclaimed Fred Randolph. "What do you think of that! I'll bet it's the remainder of Laton's gang and they are trying to loot the village."

There was no doubt of this. The sight was enough to inflame the minds of the Grays. With anger they fixed bayonets and waited for the order to advance.

It was not long in coming. Will Randolph regarded the scene with flashing eyes.

"It is time these lawless gangs of bushwhackers and outlaws were wiped out of existence," he said.

"Here is a good beginning," cried Nelson.

"You are right! Forward, boys!"

The Grays with a cheer now charged down the road. It was not a quarter of a mile they had to traverse.

They were soon in the village street. They were seen coming by the villagers who sent up wild cheers.

The guerillas had fired six of the houses and the scene was a thrilling one. But as the Grays appeared they beat a retreat.

Intent on capturing them Will tried to head them off. A few were shot but the most of them managed to mount and dash away.

As the Grays were on foot it was of no use to pursue. But the boys came to a halt in the village street.

The villagers, young men and old, poured over the barricade to greet them. The women and children had been huddled in the church.

As the villagers greeted the young Confederates they gave vent to their feelings in a forcible way.

"It's time something should be done to wipe out those outlaws," declared one of the leading men of the place to Will. "There never was anything like this in Maryland before. It is terrible."

"I agree with you," said Will. "But you must remember that it has always been so in all wars."

"But this is a civilized nation."

"Presumably! Your village, though, is in the track of an advancing army. About the skirts of all armies there are bound to be lawless characters and predatory bands."

"Then we must arm to defend our homes."

"A wise idea!" said Will. "You ought to organize a Home Guard!"

However, the arrival of the Grays had been opportune indeed for the villagers and they were extremely grateful. It was insisted that they should remain long enough to partake of the hospitality of the place.

As the Grays were short of rations they could not refuse and at once proceeded to satisfy their hunger when appetizing meals were tendered them.

Will also learned an important fact and this was that

heavy cannonading had been heard the day before a few miles to the north and one of Jackson's columns had passed through the town at daybreak.

He had reported that the enemy were in full retreat before the advancing Confederate columns. This was encouraging news indeed.

"It's all right," declared Nelson. "I tell you, Prentiss, we can keep up our scouting trip and join the army's main line as it overtakes us."

"That looks feasible," said Will. "Only I wish we had horses."

The scout was reflective a moment.

"It is probable that there are not horses enough in this whole town to mount our company."

"Indeed there is not a horse in the place," declared Will. "The guerillas took them all away."

"Look here! I have an idea."

"What?"

"It is my belief that those fellows have not gone far. Why could we not trail them until dark and then make a surprise attack and capture their horses?"

"It would be perfectly feasible if we could locate them."

"Oh! that is true. Of course they can be twenty miles from here before night. Oh, well, we must trust to our legs."

"Perhaps an opportunity may occur yet to get mounts," said Will. "If we could get into saddle there is much that we could do just now."

"Indeed there is!"

But Will had no idea of wasting time. As soon as the Grays had partaken of the food given them by the grateful villagers they shouldered arms to march away.

Leaving the hamlet they now continued along the country road. Will Prentiss knew well enough that this procedure was not without risk.

At any moment they might come upon a superior force of the Union foe. But they could push along more rapidly in the highway and so were tempted to keep in it.

For two miles the Grays marched on. Then they came to a little cut in a high ridge. The road here wound through an orchard of peach trees and a small frame house stood close to the highway.

On the steps of the house stood a female figure. From her sharp features and her generally severe air Will adjudged her to be a spinster.

As the Grays came marching along at a swinging pace the woman dodged into the house.

But the next moment she reappeared with a tea-kettle in her hand. From the tea-kettle there was merrily puffing a cloud of steam.

"Hello!" exclaimed Joe Spotswood. "I believe that old maid is laying for us. You know there are a lot of radical partisans along in this part of Maryland."

"What do you mean?" asked Will.

"We will probably get a dose of that hot water," said the orderly sergeant. "There! What did I tell you?"

The angular female with the tea-kettle had rushed into

the center of the road. There she stood like a rock and holding up the tea-kettle threateningly.

"You'uns kaint go by my house!" she screamed. "Go 'long back to yer own country. We'uns don't want ye in our State. Go on back ter Varginia!"

Will was astounded. He had never witnessed greater spleen or hatred. It was all the more remarkable as she betrayed by her vernacular that she was a Carolinian or a Georgian herself.

At the same moment a negro boy thrust his woolly head above the stone wall by the wayside and cried warningly:

"Look out fo' yo'selves, sogers! Dat am ole Missy Quig and she shuah frow dat scaldin' water on yo'."

But the Grays marched on, and not until they were within a few yards of the irate spinster did Will give the order to halt.

"Go on back to yer own kentry; you'uns aint no right up here. I aint nuthin' but a defenceless woman but I'll not let ye march by my house."

Will advanced with dignity and said:

"Madam, I am sorry, but you obstruct our path. Kindly go back into your house and avoid trouble."

"Hey! You'll order me shot, I s'pose. That's jest like you low-down Varginians. You kin fite wimmen but you'll run away from a pop-gun in ther hands of a man."

Will was in a dilemma.

He had no desire to use violence or to argue with the woman. So he said:

"It is plain that you forget your dignity as a lady——"

"A lady!" howled the spinster as she menaced Will with the tea-kettle. "Ye dare to insult me! That's all ye kin do is to insult wimmen. Go on back! Ye kaint pass here!"

Will turned to his men.

"By the right flank! March!" he said.

It was his purpose to cross the wall and march around the spot. He was willing to do this rather than dispute the pass with this irate female.

But when Miss Quig saw the move and that it was likely to foil her purpose she grew purple with rage.

Unable to control herself she screamed in anger and darting forward threw the kettle full of water into the ranks of the Grays.

The scalding water struck several of the boys in face and neck and even penetrated their uniforms. The victims yelled with pain. One of the boys fell overcome with the pain of the hot liquid in his eyes.

This was more than Will could stand. He rushed forward and grasping the woman's wrists held her.

"You infamous witch!" he cried. "You shall be punished for this."

But the spinster fought and kicked and bit at Will like a tiger. Joe and Nelson rushed to his assistance.

It required their combined efforts to subdue the crazed woman. Will Prentiss was angry. For a moment he knew not what to do.

"Well, ye got ther wust of it, didn't ye?" screamed the spinster. "Larn ye better than to attack a defenceless woman."

"Is there no sense of decency or modesty in your composition!" cried Will. "You attacked us. You have ruined the eyesight of one of my boys. You ought to be hung for it."

"Hang me!" snarled the spinster. "Hang me, I say! That's all you Varginians can do is to hang wimmen."

"We can't class you as a woman," retorted Will. "No woman would lower herself as you have."

"An' you're no man, only an insignificant little puppy!" snapped Miss Quig.

Will turned to Nelson and said:

"No use! You couldn't get the best of her. Tell the boys to carry her into her house and lock her in. We can't waste time here."

"Whew! If we had to meet an army like her I'd get off the earth at once," declared the scout. "Her tongue is worse than any charge of grape and canister I ever saw."

CHAPTER XV.

WHICH ENDS ALL.

Miss Quig resisted with all the wiry muscle of her skinny frame. But the Grays carried her bodily into her house and then barricaded the door.

Her screams and yells could be plainly heard as she endeavored to break out again and renew the attack on the Grays.

Will hurriedly gave orders for the little company to march on. They were soon past the spinster's residence and it is needless to say that they were glad of it.

"Whew!" cried Will, mopping the perspiration from his brow. "I'd rather face a den of lions any time!"

"She's not done yet, either," cried one of the boys. "Look there!"

Looking back the irate virago could be seen standing in the road waving her skinny arms and launching an endless tirade after them. Now for the first time the affair struck the boys as funny in the extreme.

Anger gave way to laughter and all became convulsed with merriment.

As it was certain that she would not pursue them the boys contented themselves with shouting back a few consoling remarks as retaliation:

"Good-bye, Madame Tea-Kettle!"

"You're a heroine all right!"

"The Yankees ought to give you a monument. You're a match for the whole Southern army."

Laughing and jesting the Grays had now reached the little cut in the ridge. Suddenly one of the advance scouts came running back excitedly.

"Captain Prentiss," he cried. "I hear drums ahead. Some body of soldiers are coming."

In an instant Will gave the quick order to leave the highway. The Grays sprang over the rail fence and got into the thicket quickly.

Then plainly enough they heard the distant roll of drums. The next moment into the cut came horsemen.

They were videttes.

They came nearer and a great cry went up from the Grays as they were seen to wear the Confederate uniform.

"By jingo! I believe it is our army!" cried Fred Randolph. "It is Jackson's advance!"

The next moment into the cut came a marching column of gray. The little company pressed forward to the rail fence.

Signals were exchanged with the videttes, who now rode forward. The leader of them called out:

"Who are you?"

"The Virginia Grays. Captain Will Prentiss," was the reply.

"What are you doing here?"

"We have been scouting in advance of the army. We desire to report to General Stonewall Jackson."

"Remain where you are. The General and his staff will soon come along."

Will drew the Grays up in a thin line. They were but a meagre handful, scarcely thirty of them left.

But as the marching ranks went by they saluted and were cheered. Column after column of sturdy sons of the South passed by.

Then came the glitter of officers' uniforms. Mounted on a white horse General Jackson, the idol of the South, rode in advance.

As the great leader gazed upon the little company by the roadside he gave a start. He spurred his horse forward.

"Prentiss!" he cried; "I am glad to see you!—I heard you had been captured."

"We were, but escaped," replied Will. "I am here to report to you."

The General stared at the thin line of Grays.

"You have seen hard service," he said. "Are these—all?"

"All that is left," said Will with a queer choking in his throat. "We have done our duty, General!"

Jackson touched his hat reverently.

"Heaven rest the souls of our comrades in death," he said. "Bring up a horse for Captain Prentiss, orderly. Your boys may fall in, in the next division, Prentiss. I want you to ride with me."

Mounted beside General Jackson Will made a full report of all his doings and the hard luck which had befallen the Grays.

General Jackson listened gravely.

"You have done nobly, Prentiss," he said. "Now, I desire to speak to you upon an important subject. I know you are wedded to your little company."

"But the truth is, Prentiss, we are in sore need of brave leaders. Our officers have met with frightful mortality. We need men like you in higher command. Do you understand?"

Will drew a deep breath.

"My life is my country's," he said. "I wish to serve her in the best capacity."

General Jackson's face lighted up.

"You are a boy of good sense. Your little company has won fame. But it has ceased to exist in the full strength of a company. You will find it impossible to recruit it with the necessary class to keep up its personnel."

"I understand, General Jackson," said Will Prentiss, sadly. "A great many of our boys have fallen."

"Yes, and it is necessary to issue a conscription. Now I will see that your young comrades are given good posts. Your lieutenant, young Randolph shall be advanced to the grade of lieutenant-colonel. You will be promoted to colonel and will be attached to General Lee's staff."

"I deeply appreciate the honor," said Will Prentiss. "I shall do all in my power to deserve it."

"I feel sure of that, Will. You know that we leading men of the army are just as apt to be taken away as any private in the ranks. Some one must stand ready to fill our places. I feel sure that I shall not myself see the end of the war!"

As history records the general's words were prophetic. A great heart was stilled, a master hand was lost, and the South dealt an irreparable blow when Stonewall Jackson was killed a few months later.

We need write but little more to close the history of the Virginia Grays as a military organization in the great war of the Rebellion.

The little company of brave youths of which but a handful was left were disbanded a few days later.

All of the boys were given officers' commissions from the rank of sergeant upward.

Fred Randolph and Will Prentiss were attached to the staff of General Lee. Joe Spotswood was made captain of a Virginia company of volunteers and served to the end of the war with great honor.

Nelson, the scout, remained in the service and was killed at Petersburg.

To-day Will Prentiss resides in a pretty little Virginia town. Nearby lives his chum and brother officer, Fred Randolph. Both have families and are prosperous and happy.

The loss of their cause for a time affected their fortunes and was a bitter blow. But in these later days of calmer reasoning they are like others reconciled, and no truer or stauncher adherents of the Stars and Stripes may be found than the two young Confederate officers.

Spotswood resides in Richmond. He often visits Will and Fred, and many a winter's eve they gather at the fire-side of their homes to talk over the thrilling incidents of those stirring days when they fought with the Virginia Grays in the greatest war of history, and fought with honor too.

THE END.

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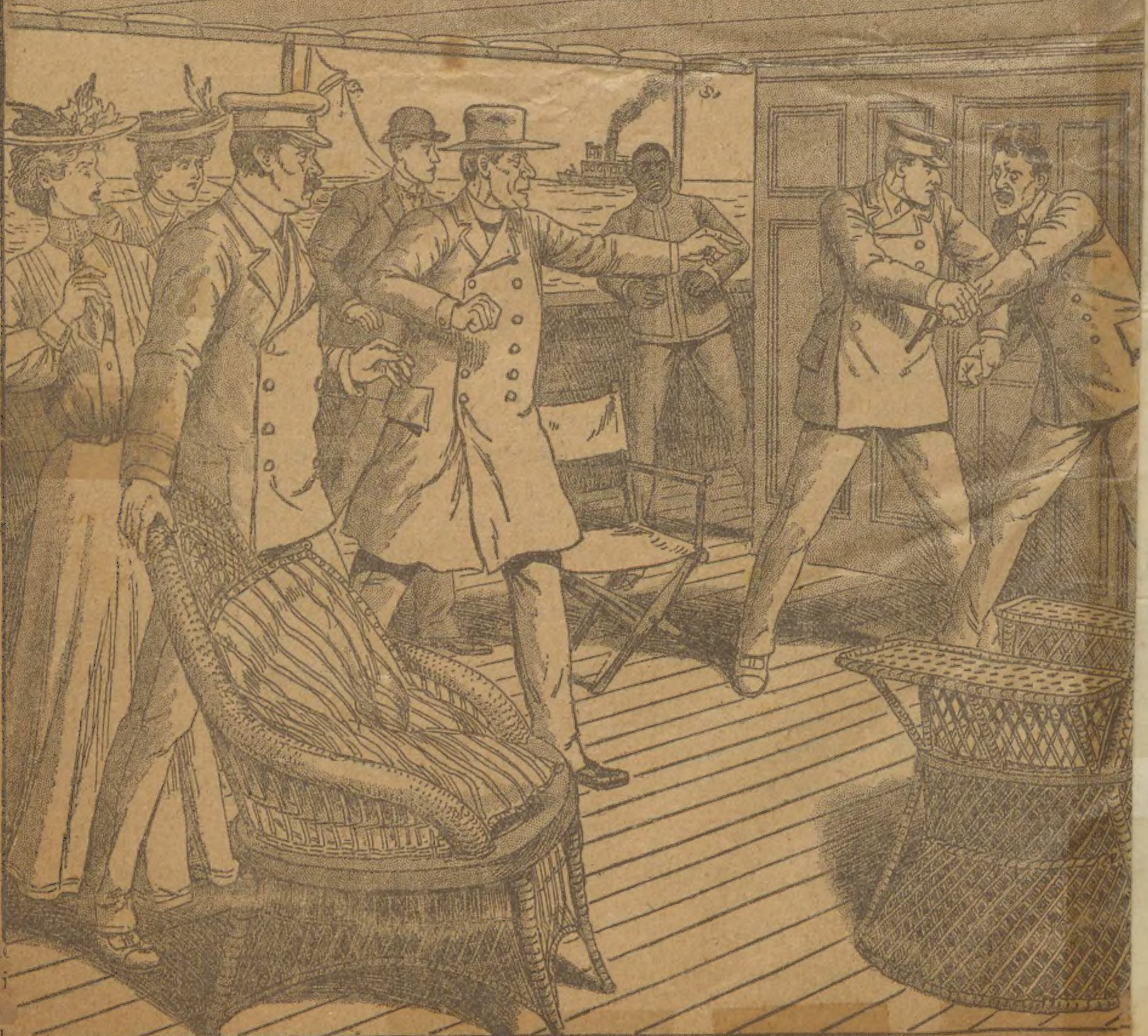
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